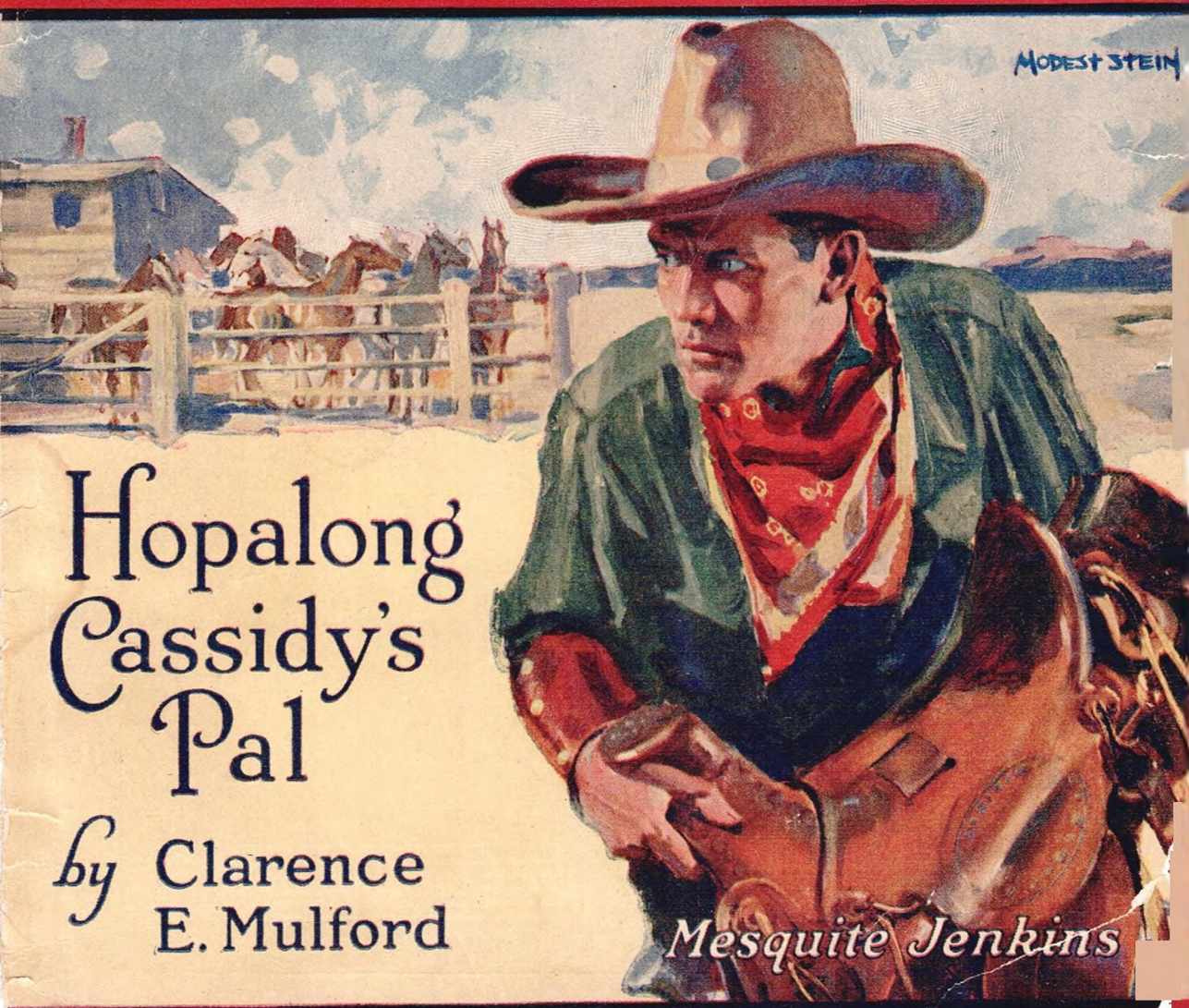
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Hopalong Cassidy's Pal

by Clarence E. Mulford

Mesquite Jenkins

10¢ PER COPY — MAY 2 — BY THE YEAR $4.0

"Let me see you do it"

THEY had been reading a magazine advertisement that made a very unusual claim for a certain product.

She was skeptical. He, having made the test once before, insisted that it was possible.

"Well, let me see you do it, if you can," she demanded. "I've used onions often enough in the kitchen, and I know how hard it is to get the odor off my hands."

So he produced a big, healthy Bermuda, proudly redolent in all its pungent glory. He sliced it in half and rubbed its oils carefully on both hands.

Then, as the advertisement challenged, he doused on some Listerine, the safe antiseptic, that possesses such remarkable deodorizing properties.

Even before the Listerine had quite evaporated, the onion odor had entirely disappeared.

If it had not been done right before her eyes, she would probably never have believed it.

Listerine *is* a remarkable deodorant. And Listerine advertising does not over-state the case.

That is why so many thousands use it daily to combat halitosis (unpleasant breath). And that is why so many thousands of women are coming to use it as a perspiration deodorant. They just apply it clear. It is non-irritating, refreshing, does not stain garments, and *it does the work.*

Listerine has dozens of other uses, all described in the circular that comes with every bottle.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

For HALITOSIS use LISTERINE

LISTERINE Throat Tablets are now available. Please do not make the mistake of expecting them to correct bad breath. Rely on the liquid, Listerine. Containing all of the antiseptic essential oils of Listerine, however, they are very valuable as a relief for throat irritations.—25 Cents.

DURHAM-DUPLEX

Handsome *new* Sets

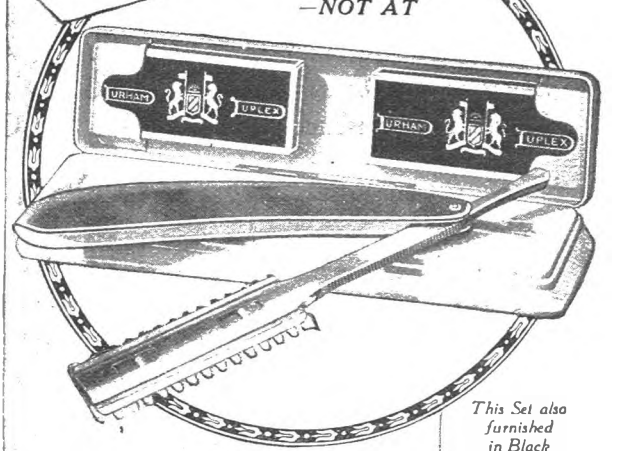
$1.50 Each

Including two packages of 5 Durham-Duplex Blades

THE most durable as well as the most beautiful razor sets ever offered to the Shaving Men of America. A *lifetime* of Good Morning shaves in every one.

Take your choice—whether you prefer the "Safety" type razor or the long-handled "Safe" style. Ten of the same famous long Durham-Duplex Blades with each set—months of the quickest, smoothest shaving you've ever enjoyed.

The Blades Men Swear By —NOT AT



This Set also furnished in Black Leather Kit

Get a Durham-Duplex Demonstrator Razor with one double-edged blade for 25 cents. (Either style.) A real Razor—not a toy. If your dealer cannot supply you mail the coupon at once.

Interchangeable Blades—50c for a package of 5

DURHAM-DUPLEX RAZOR CO., Jersey City, N. J.

Durham-Duplex Razor Co.,
190 Baldwin Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

I enclose 25c for which send me a Durham-Duplex Demonstrator Razor with one detachable, double-edged blade. I prefer the "Safety" Type.....
The Long-handled "Safe" Type..... AF5

Signed.....

Address.....

City.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXVIII | CONTENTS FOR MAY 2, 1925 | NUMBER 4

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Hopalong Cassidy's Pal . . . . . Clarence E. Mulford . . . 481
I—MESQUITE JENKINS COMES BACK.

TWO CONTINUED STORIES

Loretta Brodell . . . . . Kim Night 533
A Four-Part Story — Part Two

Dinner for Cynthia . . . . . Edgar Franklin 567
A Four-Part Story — Part Three

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

The Sea-Going Elephant . . . . . Arthur Preston Hankins . . 494
Rope Enough . . . . . Walter A. Sinclair . . . 556
At Trail's End . . . . . L. Paul 596
Old Crow . . . . . Karl W. Detzer 609
Live Bait . . . . . Arthur Lockwood 619
Smart as an Ox . . . . . Tom Curry 629
Here's My Husband . . . . . Charley Wood 634

POETRY

Reincarnation . . . . . Marie Saltus 532
Why? . . . . Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift 566
The Automatic Speaks . . Fairfax Downey 628
Half Portions . . . . . Thelma Stillson 640

If you were offered $1,000,000 as a reward for getting your name and fame on the front pages of the metropolitan daily newspapers, how would you perform the stunt? Ethelbert Percival Buchanan Logan, nicknamed "Buck" by a scoffing uncle from the West, blithely sallied forth—and stumbled headlong into the maelstrom of New York's underworld. A girl was there, as usual when a man is

LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE

By Charlton L. Edholm

First of four exciting and amusing installments next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and HOPEFIELD HOUSE, HANWELL, W. 7, LONDON, ENGLAND

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

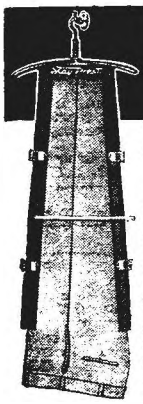
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT 1925

Entered as second-class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

A2



$123 the First WEEK

"I worked 6 days, 6 hours a day, and made $123 selling 'Stay-Prest' Trouser Pressers."
J. W. Varner, Iowa.

"Stay-Prest" Trouser Presser sells quick to every man—thousands in use. Men and women are cleaning up big profits with this fast seller. Sells on sight. Priced low. Big cash profit for you. You take orders. We deliver. Your profit in advance. Wonderful **New Invention.** Puts perfect creases in trousers. Takes out wrinkles and baggy knees. Easy to use—takes less than half a minute. Folds into small size. Saves clothes and tailor bills.

Make Big Profits—Others Do. Jack Ames made $24 in four hours. Randle sold 25 the first day. Mary Roberts made $10 in one evening. Others making big profits in spare or full time. So can you. You risk nothing.

FREE! We start you. Write quick for FREE selling outfit and full details of money making selling plan.

THE GETGEY-JUNG CO., E-119 G & J Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio

"DON'T SHOUT"

"I can hear you with the MORLEY PHONE. It is invisible, weightless, comfortable, inexpensive. No metal, wires, nor rubber. Can be used by anyone, **young or old.**"

The **Morley Phone** for the

DEAF

is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. **Write For Free Booklet** containing testimonials of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness; tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

THE MORLEY CO. Dept. 709, 10 S. 18th St., Phila.

FREE Book on Deafness

Write *today* for 168 page FREE book giving full particulars and testimonials from hundreds of grateful users whose hearing has been restored by use of our *"little wireless phones for the ears."*

Wilson Common-Sense Ear Drums

require no medicine but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

WILSON EAR DRUM CO., Incorporated
858 Inter-Southern Bldg. LOUISVILLE, KY.

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone.** Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Grand Prix.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely FREE

Write name on Coupon and send TODAY.

Plapao Co., 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name.....

Address.....

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.....

Do You Want A Better Job?

THE only difference between success and failure is a matter of training. The big men in business today did not reach their present success through luck or chance.

They got into the work for which they were best fitted—and then trained themselves to know more about their jobs than anyone else. When opportunity came—as it always comes—these men were ready to grasp it and turn it into fame and dollars.

You have just as good a chance to succeed as these men had—perhaps better! Good positions are always waiting for trained men—positions that you can get if you train yourself to deserve them.

You can secure this training easily and quickly at home through spare-time study with the International Correspondence Schools, just as so many other men have done. The I. C. S. way is the practical way—the fascinating way—the profitable way.

All that we ask is this:—Fill out the coupon printed below and mail it to Scranton. This doesn't obligate you in the least—but it will bring you the full story of what the I. C. S. can do for you. Today is the day to send in that coupon. "Tomorrow never comes."

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2166-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Architects' Blue Prints
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Metallurgy	☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Radio	☐ Mathematics

Name.....

Street Address..... 3-6-24

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT A

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

Why not sell us your spare time. $11.80 daily in advance (send for sworn proof) Introducing New Insured Hosiery. 47 styles, 37 colors, guaranteed seven months. All the latest shades, Airedale, Windsor Tan, Mode, Russian, Congo, 30 others. No capital or experience required. You simply take orders. We deliver and collect (or you can deliver, suit yourself). Credit given. PAY YOU DAILY, monthly bonus besides. We furnish samples. Macochee Textile Co., Station 27010, Cincinnati, O.

Our New Proposition on Portraits, Frames, Medallions, Pillow Tops, Sheet Pictures, Toilet Requisites, Food Products, and Agents Specialties a big winner. No money required. Write immediately. Samples Free. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk 05, Chicago.

WANTED several hundred men to represent manufacturer taking orders for shirts, raincoats, topcoats, sweaters, overalls. Big commissions daily. Send for free sample outfit. NORTHERN SALES CO., 221 Northern Office Bldg., Chicago.

Make Money in Your Spare Time—Easy to make $1 to $2 an hour by following our instructions. No Money or Experience Necessary. Write TODAY for particulars. Costs nothing to investigate. American Products Co., 2424 American Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

LIGHTNING STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND. Charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates old method entirely. Gallon free to agents. Lightning Co., St. Paul, Minn.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter & Mfg. Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

$20 PROFIT DAILY SELLING SELF THREADING NEEDLES, NEEDLEBOOKS. Cost 3c-5c. Sell 25c. Three Samples 25c. Catalogue Free. NEEDLEBOOK SPECIALTY CO., Dept. 2, 661 Broadway, New York.

DOES $5,000.00 A YEAR INTEREST YOU?—Write and let us explain our special **Guarantee** offer. CRUVER MFG. CO., 2462 JACKSON, CHICAGO, ILL.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

I PAY MEN $100 A WEEK, selling our fine made-to-measure, all-wool suits—Direct to wearer—All ONE price, $31.50. Biggest Values. Highest Commissions in advance. We deliver and collect. 6x9 swatch samples furnished. Write today. State selling experience fully. W. Z. Gibson Inc., 161 W. Harrison St., Dept. E-400, Chicago.

66 Miles on 1 Gallon—Reported by Geo. Cousins using Wonderful Vapor Humidifier on his Ford. For all make Cars. Many other big records. 1 free to introduce. Exclusive spare or full time car owner agents wanted everywhere. Critchlow, AA-MAY-39, Wheaton, Ill.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, criticized, published, copyrighted, marketed. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 209 Security Bldg., Santa Monica and Western Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

20 ACRES OR MORE OF OUR BEST LAND IN MICHIGAN. $20 per acre. 25c per acre down; balance your own terms. 52 page book free. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

EDUCATIONAL

RAILROAD POSTAL CLERKS start $133 month, railroad pass. Send stamps for questions. COLUMBUS INSTITUTE, A-6, Columbus, Ohio.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 644 G St., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for FREE Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch and description of invention for Inspection & Instructions free. Terms Reasonable. Prompt Attention. Highest References. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for our free Evidence of Invention blank and guide book, "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch of your invention for our Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms Reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept 419, Washington, D. C.

Patents Procured: Trade Marks Registered—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 41-J Park Row, New York.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

EASY TO SELL GROCERIES, PAINTS, AUTOMOBILE OILS—FROM SAMPLES TO CONSUMERS IN TOWN AND COUNTRY. OUR PRICES MEET ALL COMPETITION. No capital or experience necessary. Profitable, steady or part time work. Commission advanced. Satisfaction guaranteed; 53 years in business. Reference any bank or express company. WRITE FOR PARTICULARS.
LOVERIN & BROWNE COMPANY, Wholesale Grocers.
1735 SO. STATE STREET CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. CARNATION CO., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS, our new Household Cleaning Device washes and dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. Write HARPER BRUSH WORKS, 329 Grimes St., Fairfield, Iowa.

MAKE BIG PROFITS selling large nationally advertised line $12.50 suits and topcoats, also raincoats, neat waterproof kitchen aprons, umbrellas. JACKSON RAINCOAT COMPANY, Dept. L, 720 Roosevelt, Chicago.

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES. Sell Madison "Better-Made" shirts for large manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn $100 weekly and bonus. MADISON MFRS., 503 Broadway, New York.

Take Orders $12.50 Nationally Advertised WEARWELL guaranteed suits and topcoats. Latest styles. Big profits. $2.00 outfit free. Promot delivery. Territory open. Write immediately. Consumers Wearwell Mfg. Co., Dept. M, 720 Roosevelt, Chicago.

AGENTS—$60—$200 A WEEK. Guaranteed Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Anyone can put them on. Free samples. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427A N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS—Be independent, make big profit with our soap, toilet articles and household necessities. Get free sample case offer. HO-RO-CO, 2718 Dodier, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS $42 A WEEK—Finest line of silk hose you ever saw. Latest styles and shades. Guaranteed hosiery for men, women, children. Must give satisfaction or new hose free. Write for samples. Parker Mfg. Co., Sample 1206, Dayton, Ohio.

$15 TO $25 DAILY is easy with our distinctive, big-selling line of hosiery. Extraordinary values. Extra bonus paid monthly. No experience or capital necessary. Sales kit free. Write Horsey-Bassett Co., 511 Main St., Crisfield, Md.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., are wanted for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

HELP WANTED

MEN AND WOMEN WANTED EVERYWHERE to weave rugs, carpet, etc., at home; no previous experience needed. You can equal these earnings: Mrs. Morse $100, Mr. Rozsa $242 monthly. Rush Postal today for FREE LOOM BOOK, telling all about weaving and how to make money with our $9.90 and other wonderful looms. UNION LOOM WORKS, 486 Factory Street, BOONVILLE, N. Y.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME WRITING SHOWCARDS. We instruct and provide work. KWIK SHOWCARD, 50 Hermant Bldg., Toronto, Canada.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—AS A Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for TEMPORARY offer. INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS, Dept. 1455, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

HELP WANTED—MALE

ALL MEN, WOMEN, BOYS, GIRLS, 17 TO 65, willing to accept Government positions, $117—$250, traveling or stationary. Write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN wanting forest ranger, railway mail clerk and other government positions, $1500-$2400 year. Write for free particulars. MOKANE, Dept. A-31, Denver, Colo.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

YOU TOO CAN PLAY THE HAWAIIAN GUITAR

JUST AS THE HAWAIIANS DO

PLAY ALL THE LATEST HITS

FREE! THIS $15. HAWAIIAN GUITAR

ONLY 4 MOTIONS used in playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

PLAY IN HALF HOUR After you get the 4 easy motions, you can play harmonious chords with very little practice. 40,000 students have learned to play in this easy, pleasant way.

EASY LESSONS The 52 printed lessons with a great many pictures make it easy to learn quickly. You don't have to know how to read notes. No previous musical knowledge necessary. You learn to play any kind of music, and pay as you play.

FREE GUITAR As a special offer to new students we give this full size, high grade instrument free of charge. It is sent at once without red tape or delay.

WRITE AT ONCE Send your name at once and let us tell you all about the 52 easy lessons and the free guitar. You have everything to gain. Don't put it off. A post card will do. Ask for new special offer and easy terms.

Special courses on Violin, Tenor-Banjo, Banjo-Ukulele and Ukulele

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.
233 Broadway (Woolworth Bldg.
Dept. 85, New York, N. Y.

Agents $90.00 A Week

Big Winner. Just out. Complete line of waterproof aprons for men, women and children. Year-round demand. Show samples—housewives order on sight. Styles for every use. Best values in America. Direct from Akron, the rubber city. **100% Profit.** Mrs. Martin, W. Va., made $30.00 in one day. Jos. Brand, Ohio, made $10.43 in one hour. You can do as well.

FREE Outfit —to workers. New plan starts you without capital. No experience needed. Simply take orders. We deliver and collect. Commissions paid same day you take order. Send for exclusive territory and **Free Outfit Offer.** WRITE TODAY.
KRISTEE MFG. CO., 645 Bar St., Akron, O.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME

YOU can earn good money at home in your spare time making show cards for us. No canvassing or soliciting. We show you how by our new simple instructograph method. We supply both men and women with work at home, no matter where you live and pay you cash for all work completed each week. Full particulars and booklet free. Write to-day.

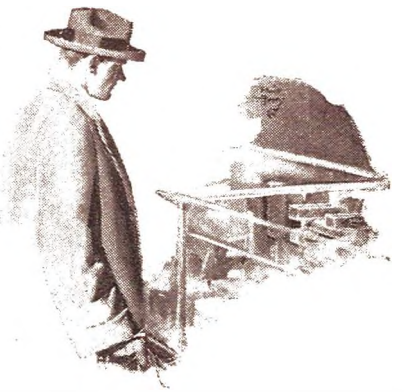
AMERICAN SHOW CARD SYSTEM LIMITED
202 Adams Building, Toronto, Canada

SONG WRITERS! $250 ADVANCE ROYALTY

will be paid on songs found suitable for publication. Submit your manuscripts for immediate examination.

EQUITABLE MUSIC CORPORATION
1658 T Broadway New York City

WRITE FOR *Free Book* ON *Song Writing*



Wait—*Don't Buy*

Find out first that our claims are true. Make this 10-shave test.

DEAR SIR:

You're a fair-minded man—and as such will give other men a chance to prove any sincere claims they advance.

Now the ones we make for Palmolive Shaving Cream are pretty broad. You may question them.

So we say, "Don't buy yet"—Let us send you a 10-day tube to try. And thus, grant us the opportunity of proving how true those claims are.

Men by the millions have shifted to this unique cream. Today it occupies pinnacle place in its field; its success is a trade sensation.

Find Out, Please

So we ask you, now, in fairness to us both, please mail the coupon. We'll rest our case on what you find. After 10 days of new shaving delight, few men go back to old ways.

5 Delights

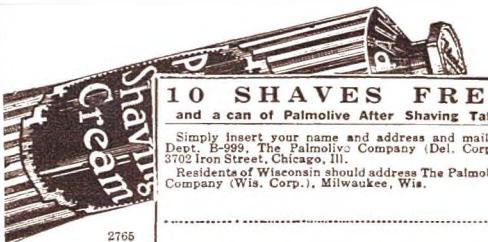
Five remarkable results:

1—**Multiplies itself in lather 250 times.**
2—**Softens the beard in one minute.**
3—**Maintains its creamy fullness 10 minutes on the face.**
4—**Strong bubbles hold the hairs erect for cutting.**
5—**Fine after-effects, due to palm and olive oil content.**

To add the final touch to shaving luxury, we have created Palmolive After Shaving Talc—especially for men. Doesn't show. Leaves the skin smooth and fresh, and gives that well-groomed look. Try the sample we are sending free with the tube of Shaving Cream. There are new delights here for every man who shaves. Please let us prove them to you. Clip coupon now.

THE PALMOLIVE COMPANY (Del. Corp.), Chicago, Ill.

PALMOLIVE SHAVING CREAM



10 SHAVES FREE
and a can of Palmolive After Shaving Talc

Simply insert your name and address and mail to Dept. B-999, The Palmolive Company (Del. Corp.), 3702 Iron Street, Chicago, Ill.

Residents of Wisconsin should address The Palmolive Company (Wis. Corp.), Milwaukee, Wis.

2765

.....

.....

ORDER TODAY—YOUR DRESSES ARE READY TO SHIP RIGHT NOW—FREE BARGAIN CATALOG WITH EVERY ORDER

3 DRESSES For the Price of One $2.98 For All Three

AMERICA'S GREATEST BARGAIN SALE TO GET NEW CUSTOMERS

No Extra Charge for Stouts Sizes: 32 to 53 Bust

Linene
Voile
Gingham
All 3 Dresses for Only $2.98
We don't make a cent on these dresses, but you will be so pleased with your bargain, that you will send us all your future orders.

We know no better way to make satisfied customers than to give wonderful bargains, **but you must ACT QUICK.** The neat linene dress is beautifully embroidered and has turn back collar, tie strings and sash belt. The pretty voile dress is made with a lace edge collar, and 2 rows of Venice lace down front, with buttons between, and the checked gingham dress is made in popular coat effect, neatly trimmed with braid and buttons, and has two pockets and popular Peter Pan Collar. Neat, dressy styles, suitable for street and house wear, and for all ages and figures. Rush Your Order TODAY. **A season's supply of dresses for about the regular price of one. All sizes, including stouts, without any extra charge. SIZES: 32 to 53, bust.**

Send No Money—just send letter or postcard NOW! When dresses are delivered pay mailman only $2.98 and postage. **If not satisfied we will return your money. Isn't that fair?**

NORMAN ROBERTS & CO.
1428 N. Wells St., Dept. 70-D-93, CHICAGO, ILL.

EIGHT HOUR SERVICE—YOUR ORDER SHIPPED SAME DAY RECEIVED—FREE BARGAIN CATALOG WITH EVERY ORDER

WANTED—$1900 to $2700 Year

Every second week off—full pay. Common education sufficient. Write IMMEDIATELY for free list of Government positions now obtainable; free sample examination questions and sample coaching.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE Dept. D-288 ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Rider Agents Wanted

Select from the **44 Styles**, colors and sizes of **Ranger** Bicycles. Ride and exhibit sample Ranger and make money. **Delivered free,** *express* prepaid, **on Approval. Factory-to-Rider** bicycles **$21.50** up. **$5 a Month** on any Ranger if desired. Boys and girls easily save the small monthly payments. Parents often advance first payment.

Tires best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid.* Lamps, wheels and equipment, low prices. **Send No Money,** do business *direct* with makers.

Mead CYCLE COMPANY DEPT. T-30, CHICAGO

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvelous easy payment terms

NEW KIND of SHOE

SEASON'S BIGGEST SELLER

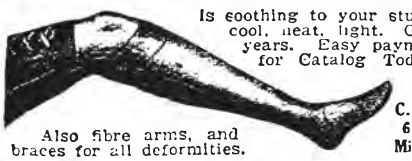
Now, through a wonderful discovery women can wear the most up-to-the-minute stylish shoes with comfort and at amazing savings. And salesmen are cashing in on the demand for this wonderful new kind of shoe, many of them making as high as $25 a day. Highest quality, lowest prices, styles months in advance of the stores make every woman a customer—and repeat sales are astounding. Write quick for FREE sample case and FREE territory offer, addressing me personally, **ROGER WILSON.**

STYLE-ARCH SHOE COMPANY
Dept. 545 22 E. 12th St. Cincinnati, Ohio

Retain the Charm Of Girlhood A Clear Sweet Skin Cuticura Will Help You

Use Cuticura Soap Every Day

BUCHSTEIN'S FIBRE LIMB



Is soothing to your stump,—strong, cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5 years. Easy payments. Send for Catalog Today.

Also fibre arms, and braces for all deformities.

C. Buchstein Co., 610 3rd Ave., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

$1 DOWN

21 Jewels

Nothing less than 21 Ruby and Sapphire jewels is good enough for the Burlington masterpiece.

Quality and Style

Adjusted to the second—temperature—isochronism—positions. 25 year Gold Strata Case, in 100 exquisite designs. Only $1 down. Balance in small monthly payments. **Send for free book.**

Burlington Watch Company
19th Street and Marshall Boulevard
Dept. 14-55, Chicago, Illinois

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED on cash or royalty basis. Patented or unpatented. In business 24 years. Complete facilities. References. Write ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249 Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

WANTED TO BUY

Mail Us Your Discarded Jewelry, Gold Crowns and Bridges, Watches, Diamonds, Silver, Platinum, War Saving Stamps and Old False Teeth. Money sent by return mail. Packages held 4 to 12 days and returned if our offer is refused. United States Smelting Works (The Old Reliable), Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.

IF you have any trouble in obtaining NYOIL send to us and we will see that you are promptly supplied. Cleanest, finest lubricating oil for light machinery and all household uses in the world.

For Typewriters, Sewing Machines, Phonographs, Guns, Razors, Revolvers, Lawn Mowers, Small Motors. Removes rust, prevents rust. Polishes finest surfaces.

NYOIL The SPORTSMAN'S FRIEND 35c *In handy cans.*

W. F. NYE, New Bedford, Mass., *Makers*

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

A6

Sensational Cut in Standard Tire Prices!

Here is another of our record-breaking sales! **Two tires for less than the usual cost of one, and a free inner tube with each tire!** *Cut your tire bills in two.* Thousands of steady customers are getting full mileage out of these tires and you, too, can get **12,000 Miles**

You can get the mileage in our tires. Order and prove it, but ORDER NOW! Supply limited and going fast!

Note Big Saving on Orders for Two Tires

Size	1 Tire	2 Tires	Size	1 Tire	2 Tires
28x3	$6.95	$ 7.95	34x4	$13.25	$20.95
30x3	7.25	10.95	32x4½	17.95	29.95
30x3½	8.25	13.45	33x4½	18.45	30.45
32x3½	9.45	15.95	34x4½	18.95	30.95
31x4	10.65	18.95	35x4½	19.45	31.45
32x4	11.85	18.75	36x4½	19.95	31.95
33x4	12.45	19.95	35x5	21.95	33.45

SEND NO MONEY We Require No Deposit. Shipment C. O. D. If not fully satisfied on examination your money will be promptly refunded, including shipping charges. You take no risk.

ALBANY TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
1508 S. Michigan Ave. Dept. 4-52 Chicago, Illinois

Summertime

Freckles vanish, skin is made milk white

For 35 years the world has turned to Stillman's Freckle Cream each summer. One jar will delight you by the way it whitens and freshens your complexion. It has a double action. Freckles are gently dissolved away, and the skin whitened at the same time. Guaranteed to remove freckles or money refunded. At druggists and department stores, 50c and $1.00.

Write for "Beauty Parlor Secrets"

Free booklet tells what your particular type needs to look best. Introduces other Stillman toilet articles to you. If you buy $3 worth (other than Freckle Cream) we give you $1.50 bottle of perfume free. The Stillman Co., 79 Rosemary Lane, Aurora, Ill.

Stillman's Freckle Cream *Double Action*
REMOVES FRECKLES
WHITENS THE SKIN

AGENTS NEW SPARK PLUG

Visible Flash

Just Out—Amazing Invention—**Beacon Lite** Spark Plugs. You see the flash of each explosion in the cylinders. Tells which are firing right. Greatest improvement in spark plugs since gas engines were invented. Wonderful gas savers. Agents coining money.

$90 A WEEK

Easy to make with new sure-fire plans. Sells on sight to every auto owner. Phillips, Ont., writes "Sold 2 dozen today, 3 dozen yesterday. Rush 10 dozen." Write for special **Free** Demonstrator Offer and FREE deal to introduce these wonder spark plugs in your territory. Write quick—**today.**

CENTRAL PETROLEUM COMPANY
644 Century Building Cleveland, Ohio

EARN MONEY AT HOME

IN your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you fully. Write today without obligation for full particulars and free booklet.

West-Angus Show Card Service Limited
72 Colborne Building, Toronto, Can.

Agents $12.00 a day

NEW Self-Heating IRON

New invention now makes ironing easy in every home. Ends hot stove drudgery. Cuts ironing time in half. Saves steps. Costs one cent for 3 hours use. No attachments. No cords. No tubes. Gives quick regulated heat. Guaranteed. Sells fast. Mrs. Wagner, Ohio, sold 24 in few hours spare time. Moyer, Pennsylvania, made $164 in one week. You can do as well. Work all or spare time. No experience needed. No capital. New plan. Simply take orders. We deliver and collect. Commissions paid same day you take orders. Send for exclusive territory and FREE OUTFIT OFFER. Write today.

THE AKRON LAMP CO., 626 Iron St., AKRON, OHIO

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win the highest positions and biggest success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn

$5,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. LaSalle students practicing law in every state. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 108-page "Law Guide," and "Evidence" books free. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 532-L, Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Pimples

YOUR SKIN CAN BE QUICKLY CLEARED of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body. Barbers Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin. **FREE.** Write today for my FREE Booklet, "A CLEAR-TONE SKIN", telling how I cured myself after being afflicted for over fifteen years.

$1,000 Cold Cash says I can clear your skin of the above blemishes.
E. S. GIVENS, 113 Chemical Building, KANSAS CITY, MO.

No Joke To Be Deaf

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with my Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. They stop head-noises. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I became deaf and how I make you hear. Address

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
88 Hoffman Bldg., 2539 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Mich.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Here is the Prize Recipe

Also Winners of the First Five Prizes

$1,000.00 in cash prizes

For NEW ways of using

G. Washington's

Delicious-Instant Coffee

FIRST PRIZE $500.00

ADELE EDWARDS, 23 Winant Avenue, Port Richmond, S. I., N. Y.

FIRST PRIZE RECIPE

G. Washington's Coffee Apple Cream Cake

½ cup of butter, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs, 1¾ cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ¼ teaspoon salt, ½ cup milk, 1 teaspoon G. Washington's Coffee. Cream butter, add sugar gradually, then eggs well beaten. Next sift and add flour, baking powder and salt, alternately with the milk in which the G. Washington's Coffee has been dissolved. Beat thoroughly and bake in moderately hot oven in two greased square layer cake pans.

G. Washington's Coffee Apple Filling

1 pound apples, pared and grated, 1 pound powdered sugar, rind and juice of 3 lemons, ½ pound sweet butter, 2 well beaten eggs, 1 tablespoon G. Washington's Coffee, 1 cup finely chopped pecans (optional). Put apples, sugar, rind and juice of lemons with butter into upper vessel of double boiler, place over hot water over moderate fire, and when butter is melted add well beaten eggs and cook until thick—about 15 minutes—stirring frequently. When cooked add the G. Washington's Coffee, dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water, and the pecans if used. When cold spread between layers of cake.

G. Washington's Coffee Frosting

¼ teaspoon G. Washington's Coffee, dissolved in ¼ cup boiling water, grated rind 1 orange, 1 tablespoon orange juice, 1½ cups brown sugar, ½ cup butter, ¾ cup thin cream, 1 egg yolk. Cook together all ingredients except egg yolk until a little rested in cold water forms soft ball. Cool slightly, add beaten egg yolk and beat until thick enough to spread.

2nd Prize $250.00
Mrs. Huldah McKee
4435 Clara Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

4th Prize $50.00
Nina de Sola Mendes
Pelham
New York

3rd Prize $75.00
Mrs. Henry B. Graybill
Hong Lok
Canton, China

5th Prize $25.00
Mara Serriov
General Delivery
Sarasota, Florida

The contest proved a revelation as to the many different ways in which G. Washington's Delicious Instant Coffee can be used—and don't forget it makes delicious coffee.

We have prepared a folder of the prize winning recipes and names of all winners which will be sent upon request.

Sold in three sizes—small, medium and large

G. WASHINGTON COFFEE REFINING CO.

522 Fifth Avenue New York

Afraid to smile—Pyorrhea's price
A needless victim of Pyorrhea
Tooth neglect demands its toll
She alone knows the penalty

4 out of 5

Dental statistics show that four out of every five over 40—and thousands younger, too—are victims of dreaded Pyorrhea. Will *you* escape?

Pyorrhea starts in the gums—*not* the teeth

That's one outstanding fact everybody should know. And if everybody did know it, the number of Pyorrhea's victims would be greatly reduced.

Once Pyorrhea secures a firm hold, pus pockets form, gums become weak and flabby, the teeth loosen and fall out no matter how white and sound they may be.

Forhan's For the Gums contains just the right proportion of Forhan's Astringent, as used by the dental profession in the treatment of Pyorrhea. It protects and preserves the gums, and keeps them in a firm, pink, healthy condition. If you don't care to discontinue the tooth paste you are now using, at least brush your teeth and gums once a day with Forhan's. All druggists; 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Just as a ship needs the closest attention under the waterline, so do your teeth under the gumline
Forhan's
TRADE MARK
FOR THE GUMS
BRUSH YOUR TEETH WITH IT
Specialist in DISEASES OF THE MOUTH

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste —it checks Pyorrhea

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXVIII SATURDAY, MAY 2, 1925 NUMBER 4

Hopalong Cassidy's Pal

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

Author of "The Coming of Cassidy," "Hopalong Cassidy Returns," etc.

I—MESQUITE JENKINS COMES BACK

HOPALONG CASSIDY sat on the edge of the table in the sunny dining room of the Double-Y ranch-house and listened to what his old-time foreman, and present partner, was saying. On Hopalong's weather-beaten countenance was an expression of surprise; but in his mind there was no surprise whatever.

He had been home three weeks, and in that short time, mostly spent in riding carelessly around the country, or in whittling toys for the few children on the ranch, he had learned as much as the worried man in front of him had absorbed in ten times that interval. Inwardly, Hopalong smiled, for the scene was not new to him; when good, slow, reliable Buck Peters, now a sheriff, had got into things over his head, he always had turned to the younger man. Incidents popped into Hopalong's mind

from out of the past, and he looked at the sheriff with kindling eyes; good old Buck, a man so honest that he took far too many men to be the same.

To Hopalong's way of thinking Buck was not properly suspicious, and he lacked imagination. He was too trustful, too easy-going.

"Reckon I'm gettin' old, Hoppy," confessed the sheriff of Twin River County. "I took too long to smell out that somethin' like this was in th' wind. When I did begin to smell it, I didn't seem to know, somehow, just what to do, or how to make a start ag'in' it. There was a time when I wasn't that way, a-tall. This settin' 'round a ranch that runs itself, with nothin' much to do, has put a lot of fat in my head. With you an' Tex both away, I was sorta lost."

"Buck," said Hopalong, crossing his feet, "it ain't fat; it's yore fool idear that every man's honest. If you had any reason to believe that way, it wouldn't be so bad; but you've been buttin' ag'in' cattle thieves all yore life, an' you shore oughta know better by this time. You used to say that I believed every man was a crook until I found out he was honest; you believe me that way now, an' you sorta hold it ag'in' me; yes, you do! Comin' right down to cases, who's been right most of th' time, you or me?" He paused a moment. "Buck, I can ride into Twin River right now, an' put my han's on a dozen fellers that 'd steal cattle. Every no-account scourin' that hangs out in th' Why Not Saloon will steal cattle, give 'em th' chance. Why ain't you said somethin' about this before?"

Buck's frown became a little perplexed.

"Why," he said, shifting slightly, "you said you was off th' warpath, an' was aimin' to set in th' shade an' whittle for a while." A smile tried to creep through the frown. "From what I've heard about yore doin's th' last year, I sorta reckoned mebby that you was entitled to set an' whittle. You told me, yoreself, that you was trainin' that cold-blooded Mesquite cub to step into yore shoes. Anyhow, you must 'a' heard somethin' about it, without me tellin' you."

Hopalong studied the pattern of the worn carpet as an outrageous suspicion crept into his mind. Was it possible that Buck was jealous of Mesquite? It was not probable, but it was possible. With the suspicion, he shifted his viewpoint of the whole affair, and was prepared to recognize truth if it showed itself. He chuckled, kicked his hat across the room, and looked up.

"I heard about it; heard a-plenty," he confessed.

"Then why didn't you say somethin', or do somethin'?" demanded Buck. "Yo're a deppity, ain't you?"

"I've allus considered myself one since you pinned on th' badge an' swore me in," admitted the younger man.

"Well?"

"I was sorta markin' time, Buck," said Hopalong, slowly. "That Mesquite cub is due to wander back up here, 'most any day, to argue me into goin' off som'ers with him. He'll find th' cow-towns dirty an' crooked; he'll find men are like a lot of bloodsuckin' ticks; he'll wonder why th' Lord ever made 'em, an' shore as shootin' he'll drift back here to pester me." He paused, lost in rapt meditation, swiftly reviewing his own lost illusions.

"An', meanwhile, th' cows of this county have been disappearin' slow but steady," Buck reminded him. "Down south, up north, over east—every which way, except from this ranch; an' there's no tellin' when they'll start runnin' off some of ourn, just by way of pullin' th' sheriff's nose. Yo're a hell of a deppity, settin' in th' shade, whittlin' toys for th' kids, while cattle are bein' rustled!"

"But there ain't no fat had time to pile up under *my* hat, not in three weeks, anyhow," replied Hopalong. "An', for three weeks there ain't been much rustlin', *I'll* bet. An' don't forget that a man can do a lot of thinkin', settin' in th' shade an' whittlin' toys; an' he can get a lot of funny notions just by ridin' careless over th' country. Besides, not havin' yore trustin' disposition, I was savin' up four names to tell Mesquite when he came back. Then I was goin' to put him ridin' sign along th' river between here and Twin River, while I shifted out in th' sun, kinda, an' started huntin' for strays in th' hills over west."

He winked at the sombrero lying against the wall.

" After that, pretty *pronto*," he went on, " hell would 'a' busted loose an' this here peaceful county of honest men, an' flickered here an' there over most of th' State. Mesquite's due to arrive 'most any day, now. He is, unless I've bungled a whole lot in sizin' him up. An' Buck, there was another reason why I set in th' shade." He winked at the hat again, and waited.

Buck was staring at his cheerful deputy as he had stared at him through the years. " What you mean?" he blurted.

" I mean that yore way ain't my way, an' my way ain't yore way. Yo're allus worryin' that there may be a corn on any foot yo're fixin' to step on; me, why I'm hopin' it's all corns, an' I step extra hard. If you want this rustlin' to stop, I'll stop it; but I'll stop it my own way, an' let th' real sufferers have all th' pain. Yo're too damn gentle, an' fearful of hurtin' feelin's of mebby a couple of innocent fellers. Me, if I hurt th' feelin's of any innocent hombres, why I says they deserve th' hurts for hangin' out with th' gang I'm after. Now then, if you want me to stop th' rustlin', say so, stand back, an' let me do it. I ain't through experimentin' with that Mesquite Jenkins."

" What you mean? An' why are you so cussed sweet about that cold-blooded bob-cat?"

Hopalong's face softened a little, and he took a moment before answering.

" I ain't trainin' Mesquite to step into *my* shoes, Buck," he slowly said. " I'm trainin' him to step in th' shoes I hoped my son would some day wear. When William, Junior, died, along with Mary, things looked awful dark. This Mesquite Jenkins, now—but what's th' use?" He paused again, his face drawn and its wrinkles seemed to multiply and deepen. " We'll get back to th' trail, Buck. I know this Mesquite better'n he knows hisself. He'll get plumb sick of gamblin' houses, hash houses, crooked games an' worse wimmen; an' he'll rustle up here to ask me questions, an' mebby try to get me to go off with him som'ers. He'll be restless, an' itchin' to do somethin' excitin'. Remember, Buck, that there's one thing he ain't learned yet: respect for th' law. I'm aimin' to plant th' seed in his soul, an' watch it grow. When he comes back, I'll whisper in his ear, an' off goes th' blast I've been savin' up."

Buck, who had been shown a great light as to the real connection between Hopalong and Mesquite, stroked his chin reflectively. He glanced sidewise at his thoughtful companion, and spoke:

" I ain't thinkin' so much about Mesquite, Hoppy, as I am about somethin' else. What do you mean about them four names?"

" Bein' a hell of a deppity, mebby I don't mean nothin'," retorted Hopalong.

Then he grinned, and hitched up the Colt twins lying against his thighs. Somehow they felt very good, very comforting; and he knew, in a flash, that he never would be content to sit in the shade and whittle until he was too decrepit to do anything else. He shook his head. " No use, Buck, I ain't th' whittlin' kind. An', anyhow, Red pesters me near to death, askin' how *gran' pa* is, every day, an' should he get me his wife's shawl. Wants to know what kind of wood he'll make my cane outa, an' if I want a straight or a crooked handle on it. Cussed pest! He can't even look at me without grinnin'! For a plugged peso I'd wrap him around his saddle horn!"

" You let Red alone!" sternly warned Buck. " You know he ain't plumb over that gunshot wound he got down in Laramie!"

Hopalong slid from the table, retrieved his hat and wandered toward the door. " You ain't fat, Buck; yo're *hog* fat, from th' hat clean down to th' water mark on yore neck."

Buck snorted. " I admit it! I come near bustin' into tears of joy when I saw yore faded red head comin' up th' trail! Like an old fool, I says to myself: ' Hoppy's home agin, an' everythin' will get plumb straightened out; an' all you did was to set in th' shade an' whittle! If it'd been Tex, now— But what about them four names?"

" Huh! Tex's married; he'll be gettin' fat, too, under th' hat. Got any more insults for me, before I go down to Twin River on business?"

Buck's brains either were not as fat as

he claimed they were, or they were only fat in spots. He grinned, looked quizzically into the eyes of his old and best friend, and then began looking around for his own hat.

"Wait, Hoppy, till I find that damn sombrero, an' I'll ride down there with you."

Hopalong did not bat an eye.

"Ain't no use of us both goin'," he replied. "If yo're goin' down, you can get me some smokin'—an' I'll set around, an' whittle."

"Where's that damn hat?" demanded Buck, getting red in the face. He glanced at his sober and innocent friend. "You can't fool me, Hoppy! Don't you ever forget that I cussed near raised you. Yo're goin' after them four; an' I'm goin' after 'em with you!"

"If you start to Twin River, you start alone," retorted Hopalong. "You set tight, right here on th' ranch. Can't you understand that I'm millin', waitin' for th' Kid to come back?"

"An' can't you talk for five minutes without draggin' in that Kid?" snorted Buck, with spirit.

"No more'n you could, ten years ago, without draggin' me in," rejoined Hopalong.

Buck looked squarely at his old friend.

"Hoppy, I'm takin' back that remark. Also, I'm admittin' that I can't talk for more'n five minutes, *these* days, without draggin' yore name in. If you can make a human bein' out of that cold-blooded cub of a Mesquite you won't find me standin' much in yore way. An' if you can make th' man out of him that you've made out of yoreself, you needn't apologize to nobody. You go on down to Twin River, an' get yore tobacco, an' *get it yore own way*. I'll back up any play you make, an' you know it. Reckon I'm runnin' errands for you? Besides, I got that damn account book to straighten out. Who'd ever think a man at my time of life would be keepin' account books, an' fightin' figgers? Judas Priest!"

"If you'd listen to me, an' write down th' figger you got to carry over every time, you wouldn't have to add th' same column over forty—"

"Get out!" yelled Buck, picking up the ink well.

Hopalong passed the gallery on his way to the bunk house, and heard a low call. He stopped instantly at the well-known voice, and it came to his mind that any man would stop like a flash when that voice fell on his ears.

Buck's wife, the French Rose, was music in voice, looks and movement, and there wasn't a man on the ranch who wouldn't lay down his life for her at need. His hat came off his head as though a conjuror had whisked it, and the smile on his face was like a sunrise, and as innocent. The memory of his own wife was the dearest thing he had.

Rose leaned against the window sill, with exquisite grace putting back a few rebellious hairs that had found an outlawed freedom and were dancing before her wrinkling nose and her sparkling black eyes; eyes that could flash like forked lightning, or become as soft as the waters of a limpid pool at twilight.

"Sh-h-h-h!" she cautioned, glancing toward the door of the main house, her tapering finger pressing against distracting lips.

"He will be better now, *non?* He will not worry so, an' talk in his sleep, *non?* An' you have been whittling only with your knife, *hein?* You sit in th' shade, an' you think an' think; an' then you ride aroun' a little, an' think some more, *non?*"

"Aw," said Hopalong, glancing away from those searching eyes. "Buck was allus all right; but he is a great hand for crossin' bridges when there ain't even a dry wash. He's worryin' over nothin'."

"Ah, *so?*" she inquired, her brow arched. "Do not forget that I have watched you, friend. Watched you when you looked so—so—like *this!*" Her frown expressed concentration and anxiety. "You sit an' whittle, an' then you look like that. An' when you come back from your rides you pat those guns. I am a woman. I love my husband. You can't fool me."

Hopalong toyed with a belt buckle, critically examining it.

"Say, Rose; when anybody looks like *that,* it's time to shoot or get scarce. I'm gettin' scarce, *now!*" and he hastened to make his words good, not relishing any ses-

sion of cross-questioning with the French Rose.

She looked after him, her expression betraying fear and uncertainty; and then she laughed gently, and began to hum one of her inimitable French airs. With Hopalong becoming active everything would be all right. Her adored "big man" would grow cheerful again, sleep soundly nights, and all would be well with the Peters household. And there was Red Connors, too, to make the measure of protection overflow.

Hopalong entered the bunk house to fill his tobacco pouch from a reserve supply, and found his bosom friend, Red Connors, busily engaged in repairing his saddle, beautifully wrecked in a battle for mastery with a wild three-year-old sorrel. Lanky Smith had done the riding, much to Red's satisfaction; and Lanky had stuck it out despite the saddle.

"Hello, gran'pa," grunted Red, looking up; and became instantly suspicious because of the beatific expression on his friend's freckled face. "What th' hell's makin' you look so cheerful, you Siwash?"

"Goin' down to Twin," answered Hopalong, hunting around his bunk, and hunting in vain.

To Red this was no reason at all for smiles, and he was about to say so caustically, when the suspicion in his mind became almost a certainty. "Tired of whittlin'?" he asked, hurrying his fingers with their mending.

"Tired of whittlin', an' near through thinkin'," growled Hopalong, searching over the same ground for the third time. "Can't wait for th' Kid much longer—*where'n hell's that tobacco!*"

In his haste Red pricked his finger with the needle, swore absentmindedly, and worked all the faster.

"Got anythin' to go on?" he asked as casually as he could, and hoping to delay the departure of his friend as long as possible.

"Cayuse," grunted Hopalong, regarding him suspiciously.

"Aw, you know what I mean!" retorted Red uneasily. The needle was flying.

"Some folks wouldn't reckon I had—*hey*, Red! When are you goin' to buy some tobacco for yoreself?"

"I buy more tobacco than any man in this locoed outfit!" indignantly rejoined Red, furtively and hurriedly shoving a sack farther down in his hip pocket. "What you figger on doin' in Twin?"

"I'm aimin' to buy me some smokin'; an' I'm goin' to buy me a little trunk, with a good lock, to keep it in. You mebby buy more tobacco than any man in this locoed outfit, but I'm damn shore you don't smoke none of what you buy. *That's* what I'm goin' to do down in Twin!"

"Yo're a red-headed liar!" politely retorted Red, sticking his finger again. "Yo're goin' gunnin' for somebody! Don't you reckon I can read yore signs after all these years? You wait, an' I'll go with you."

"You!" jeered Hopalong. "You ain't all healed up yet from goin' gunnin' in Laramie!"

"Who said so?" pugnaciously demanded Red, the needle poised in air.

"*You* did!" replied Hopalong, walking slowly and carelessly toward his bosom friend.

"Yo're another!"

"It was only yesterday that cookie asked you, as long as you was passin' th' storehouse, to tote him in a half a bag of potatoes," explained Hopalong cheerfully, "*I* heard what you told him, you pore invalid."

He leaned down swiftly, jerked the tobacco sack from Red's hip pocket, and was through the door in two jumps. Red dropped the saddle and went in hot pursuit, with remarkable agility for a wounded man; but he got to the door in time to see his friend wheel and lope in the direction of Twin River, driving Red's horse ahead of him. Red's remarks were plain, hasty and loud, and while he paused for breath he caught Hopalong's jeering reply.

"That so? It's got my initials on it, anyhow!"

Red scratched his head and went on the defensive, not quite certain of his ground. He remained silent under this evidence of ownership of the tobacco, but he flayed himself for not having paid more attention

to details; he was not at all sure that there were any initials on the sack, but he was in no position to argue the matter. Down the trail his friend was laughing in great good humor; there were no initials on the sack, and there did not have to be. He now was in no doubt whatever as to the real ownership of the tobacco.

Red kicked up a puff of dust and went back into the bunk house, but as he picked up the saddle he was struck by a brilliant thought: there was nothing whatever the matter with Buck's saddle, and it would not take him long to borrow Rose's or Buck's horse. A few moments later he slipped around the side of the corral, his greedy eyes on the worn saddle lying across the rail. He heard Buck's voice in a low and harassed murmur, and grinned at his good fortune: when Buck was adding up a column of figures his concentration made him oblivious of all else. Red's eager hands grasped the sixty pounds of Cheyenne workmanship and he whirled to make his escape; but he dropped the saddle to the ground and grinned through a flush which could be seen even through the coats of tan.

"Four, an' carry six—four, an' carry six. *Hey,* where you goin' with that saddle?" roared a stentorian voice from the house, and Buck reached the door simultaneously with the last word.

"Want to borry it to measure th' length of th' stirrup leathers," explained Red. "I'm puttin' new ones on mine."

"Then what was you stalkin' it for?" demanded the sheriff of Twin River County. "You shore had me scared," he sarcastically explained. "I reckoned mebby some Blackfeet had jumped th' reservation, an' you was goin' after 'em. I feel you wasn't aimin' to ride it down to Twin, was you?"

"Aw, *take* th' damn thing! I wouldn't ride it nowhere, nohow!" growled Red, kicking the inoffensive article.

"Not while I'm nowhere 'round, you won't!" retorted Buck, starting out to pick up his treasure. "If you'd quit playin' poker with Hoppy an' th' rest, you could afford to buy a new saddle for yourself. You ain't got th' sense of a prairie dog."

"Oh, *ain't* I?" demanded Red, stopping and wheeling.

"No, you ain't, an' you know it!" shouted Buck. He choked and put the saddle on the ground again. "You wave a pack of cards under a prairie dog's nose, an' see him duck."

Red was about to retort and start an argument, but he pictured the actions of a prairie dog with a man trying to get near enough to wave anything under its nose. He kicked a puff of dust with each foot, swore under his breath, and scowled.

"Any idjut knows that!" he snorted. A curious sound made his scowl deepen, and he writhed as he saw his esteemed boss drop limply on the saddle and wipe his eyes on a sleeve. "Huh! That wasn't so damn smart!" Receiving no reply, he hazarded a question. "What's gran'pa aimin' to do down in Twin?"

Buck sighed, looked up, and made two clean streaks down his face by as many rubs. His eyes were still laughing, although his face was grave; Buck was a poker player of parts.

"Buyin' hisself some tobacco," he grunted.

"Cussed if you ain't a *pair* of liars!" snorted Red. He whirled and hurried toward the bunk house to repair the saddle in the least possible time. He had just remembered that he, too, was in pressing need of tobacco. As he ducked into the bunk house and picked up the saddle to study out the fewest possible repairs needed to make it hold together to Twin River and back, the cook stuck his head in through the kitchen door.

"Gimme a hand, Red; I gotta lift th' flour barrel up on a box so I can slush th' floor."

"Ain't you got no sense?" indignantly demanded Red. "Ain't you got no sense a-tall, askin' a wounded man to strain hisself thataway?"

The cook's eyes flashed as he drew back, one hand on the edge of the door.

"*You* ain't a wounded man," he said, with great feeling. "*Yo're* just a cross-eyed, —— —— liar!" and the slam of the door shut out any possible retort.

Red sighed happily and began to work

on the saddle; there was no place like home after all. He had been a fool to stay away so long.

II.

TWIN RIVER, never any too sweet to a discriminating person, had been well weeded shortly after the old Bar-20 outfit had emigrated to its vicinity some years before; but now the town was slowly reverting to type. When Johnny Nelson had left Montana there were great hopes nursed in many a yearning breast; when Hopalong and Red had gone south a year later, there had begun a faint stirring among a certain type of range bum and saloon habitué, and cautious reconnaissances had been indulged in, with a little scattered cattle stealing; but with the going of Tex Ewalt, the time was believed close at hand to reap a harvest on the surrounding ranges.

There was no crowding rush, no precipitate plunging across the ranges, for the Double-Y outfit, shorn of its spectacular and more pugnacious units, was still a factor to be gravely considered. The men who were left had not been known, during their residence in Montana, to turn back from a job once begun, and they paid scant attention to hostile powder smoke once they were aroused. The range bums and saloon hangers-on, the less ambitious and offensive of the larger, original gang, had preferred to mark time until thoroughly convinced that it was safe to collect cattle for furtive drives.

Then there arrived in Twin River a galvanizing agent, one Slim Porter, who was not long in learning of the peculiar conditions existing in this county of many cattle. Slim's arrival preceded the return of Hopalong and Red by two months, and he lost no time in organizing a gang and drilling each man of it to play a specified part. His preliminary operations, of a tentative nature, had assayed well. He had his drive routes laid out, his selling agents selected, and was going to make a killing and get away before his own hide had a bounty placed on it.

Slim Porter had known Hopalong Cassity in the old days. As a matter of fact, Hopalong had been the pressing need for Slim's leaving the far-off southern range and seeking a more healthful locality. Therefore it was with a certain amount of foreboding that Slim learned that he had inadvertently strayed on Hopalong's adopted stamping ground. The first shock of this knowledge had been softened by the further knowledge that Hopalong had returned to the southern range.

Slim had made his decision; he would work fast and leave quickly. Then, like a bolt out of the blue, Hopalong Cassidy and an unknown youth had ridden up the trail to town. Slim felt sick, but he soon recovered, and changed his plans a little. He would mark time until he saw what Hopalong was going to do, running off a few cattle from points of the county well removed from the range of the Double-Y. Had it depended on him alone, he would have been comparatively safe in his modest and long-range operations; but three of his men, closely connected to him in the minds of all who knew them, were born gamblers. They had taken chances, and he had been called on either to help them out of their trouble or bring suspicion upon himself by their failures. His hand had been forced.

Hopalong rode slowly into Twin River for perhaps his third or fourth visit since his return to Montana, and his suspicions and observant gaze gave him the impression that the town was backsliding from its precarious and forced position of rectitude. There was an air of secretiveness, hostility and furtiveness, or his imagination was running riot. On his former visits he had taken care to pay no attention to Slim Porter, and so far as any word or action of his own was concerned he was unaware that such a person as Slim existed; this had been assisted by Slim's preference to remain out of the Double-Y puncher's sight.

Hopalong jogged through the town and across the wooden bridge which spanned the Little Jill, and turned toward the "Why Not," a saloon somewhat isolated from the rest of the town. As he dismounted before the closed door he was conscious of a flurry within the building, and when he sauntered in the feeling of hasty movements still persisted in the unnatural attitudes of the in-

mates. He carelessly nodded to the uneasy crowd and then stopped in his tracks, apparently vastly puzzled as his gaze remained centered on one man. One could see that he was searching his memory for a prompting. Slowly the puzzled look faded and a grim smile took its place. Before him stood "Pecos," now known by the name of Slim Porter.

"Hello, Pecos," he grunted, and then he turned to the bar and talked idly with the man behind it, the cracked and grimy mirror giving him a veiled scrutiny of things behind his back.

Sometimes it is useful to give a man plenty of rope, and carelessness often has served a desperate man well, tempting him into waters beyond his depth. Two men, softly rising, slipped from the building; Slim, himself well in hand, remained seated at the side of a small table. Three others gradually shifted until they were not far from Slim; and this setting of the stage remained unchanged for perhaps three minutes.

Then Slim's right arm and hand began a barely perceptible movement; the three near him moved carelessly away and apart. The atmosphere of the room changed almost insensibly, keeping pace with the growth of Slim's desperate determination.

Hopalong turned like a flash, two guns appearing in his big hands. The movement had been so quick that it found the crowd unprepared, their thoughts too self-centered on what *they* were about to do.

"Just practicin'," he explained with a grin; but there was something in his poised attitude that kept every man present from making any mistakes. The stiffness of surprise left the three friends of Slim. They relaxed, let their arms straighten out at their sides, and grinned evilly. Hopalong then gave Slim nearly his entire attention.

"Pecos," he said slowly and distinctly, "there's a warrant covered with dust layin' in a desk down in Texas. Texas is a long ways from th' jurisdiction of th' sheriff of this county, an' we ain't had no word to hold you. That bein' so, I ain't tryin' to hold you. Yo're free as a bird; but winter ain't so far away, an' Texas birds, spendin' the summer in Montanny, shore migrates. Day after to-morrow there's goin' to be a blizzard in Twin River County. It's twenty miles to th' east line, twenty-five to the south, an' near forty to th' west. You can take yore choice."

His gaze flickered to the other three and his eyes grew hard behind their narrowed lids.

"*Private* drive trails will be covered with ten feet of snow," he told them. "Th' bunch grass will be covered so deep that th' cows will die as they drift. A man should travel light, an' fast. I'm advisin' you three boys to see that Pecos don't get lost in th' storm, as he might do if he went alone; an' you all better not come back agin to this part of th' country. Rustlin' ain't th' style up here no more." His lips straightened into a thin, hard line. "Do I hear any remarks?"

There is presumed to be safety in numbers. The crowd did not deny the presumption, but seemed to doubt its application in the present instance. Still, Slim was inclined to argue.

"I was figgerin' on winterin' on a northern range," he growled. "That warrant is outlawed."

"Winterin' shore gets rid of ticks, Pecos," said Hopalong blandly; "but there's worse things than Texas fever, to Texas critters. Cattle itch is one of 'em; th' itch for another man's cows. Hot lead is another. I'll be back in a couple of days."

"You takin' any stock in them rumors?" demanded Slim angrily.

"Seein' as they're coupled with yore presence up here, I dunno," answered Hopalong, smiling thinly. "Still, I ain't takin' them as serious as I might. If I was takin' 'em for Gospel, why, I might do more than drop a hint for you to get outa th' country. I'm just doin' that so there won't be no more rumors."

Slim sneered. He counted himself good in an argument; and he might be able to talk the deputy into granting an indefinite stay.

"You can't chase a man outa th' country on nothin' more'n yore say-so," he stated without heat and purely as a matter of logic and law.

"*I* ain't chasin' you, Pecos," reproved

Hopalong. "That would be plumb unlawful. I'm just sorta puttin' th' idear into yore head; like Red did, when he was sheriff, down on th' Pecos. Two days from now I'm figgerin' on turnin' in my badge, an' slappin' yore face every time I see you; an' I'll see you frequent. I'm just tryin' to do you a good turn, an' not prod you into no shootin' match; but you can suit yoreself, Pecos." Again his gaze flickered to the other three. "That goes for you fellers, too. Make yore choice—an' abide by it. So long, boys; so long, Ike," he said to the bartender, and departed, sheathing his gun as he reached his horse.

Crossing the bridge, Hopalong headed for the Sweet Echo Hotel, and rode along its farther side, and spurred to the shed in the rear, where he dismounted and ran behind the wood pile at the corner of the kitchen. From this point of vantage he could see the Why Not without himself being seen. The front door of the saloon was closed, as he had left it, and there was nothing in its vicinity which appeared to be worth looking at; but moving northeasterly across the plain was a cloud of dust so thin that a casual observer would not have noticed it. It was rapidly receding from the direction of the Why Not, and years of experience led Hopalong to believe that it was made by more than one horse, strung out in Indian file, their riders cannily keeping the Why Not between them and the hotel. Present conditions led Hopalong to guess the number of riders as four.

An inquiring voice hailed the watcher, and Hopalong turned his head to see Slick Milligan watching him with frank curiosity.

"What you doin'?" demanded Slick, stepping from the door to see what there was to be seen.

Hopalong straightened up and squinted knowingly.

"Takin' a sight at th' weather, Slick," he said.

Slick scratched his head and stepped behind the wood pile to take a sight of his own. He looked at the eastern sky, at the Why Not, at the bridge, and at the stretching plain.

"Huh!" he snorted. "You don't have to go through all that fumadoodle to know that we're in for another week of dry spell."

"Then you don't figger there's no blizzard comin' before th' end of th' week?" inquired Hopalong hopefully.

Slick seemed to swell up. His mouth opened, but could not at once form the words. For a moment he stood silent and staring, and then he grunted profanely:

"Blizzard? Blizzard, hell! Come on in, an' take somethin'. *Hurry up!*"

Hopalong looked searchingly at the sky, shook his head in a settled disbelief, and followed the hurrying bartender into the hotel. From behind the bar Slick was waiting for him with much unconcealed anxiety, and he pushed a liberal glass of brandy toward his friend, the deputy.

"Git that into you, *pronto*," commanded Slick. "Then set down here an' rest. That sun's enough to knock *anybody* out." He wiped off the bar with fierce energy, and mumbled to himself: "Blizzard—in August—my Gawd!"

Two more drinks of brandy confirmed Slick's unbounded confidence in this liquor as an unfailing remedy for ninety-five per cent of the human ills. His patient recovered miraculously after the first drink, but was given two more doses for safety's sake.

"Whaur's Sandy th' noo?" mimicked Hopalong, after smacking his lips the third time.

"Dinna ken," chuckled Slick. "Mayhap doon to Wayback waitin' to see th' tr-rain coom in." He slicked his oiled hair, and asked a shrewd but innocent appearing question. "What's Buck doin' these days?"

Hopalong looked frankly into the bartender's eyes. He could trust Slick Milligan without the shadow of a doubt.

"Settin' back, feedin' out plenty of rope, accordin' to th' old sayin'."

"Buck believe in old sayin's?"

"He knows what he's doin'."

"Every man does things his own way," commented Slick, thoughtfully. "Yore way, now, is more from th' shoulder." It was almost a question.

"More from th' hip," corrected Hopalong. "I've done started somethin' this mornin'; an' meanwhile my iron's gettin'

hot for th' brandin'. There's another sayin'—about walls. How's business?"

"Fair, though Sandy groans an' talks about bankruptcy. Where'd you pick up that Mesquite Jenkins kid? He makes me shiver. Don't know as I like him a hull lot. Good friend of yourn?"

"Yes," replied Hopalong, uncomfortably conscious that Slick's dosage had been nothing if not heroic. "If you'd seen what I have you'd shiver a lot more. Th' kid's all right if you let him alone."

"You don't have to tell me to let him alone," growled Slick, again smoothing his hair. "Seen Slim lately?" He leaned over to pick up a burned match from the floor, and eyed it speculatively before painstakingly tossing it into a sand box cuspidor.

"Better say good-by to Slim, an' say it quick," answered Hopalong, lazily arising. His legs gave the faintest possible suggestion of yearning for independence from team work, and he flexed them, shook his belts to a more comfortable fit, and turned toward the rear door. "I'm ridin' on. Tell Sandy I'm comin' in soon for a game of penny ante with him." He laughed reminiscently. "He shore can find more sorrow in penny ante than most folks can in table stakes. A good game of stud-hoss, or a big game of draw would just about kill Sandy. Well, so long."

The August sun blazed down on a seemingly arid plain of gravel, sand and clay, the crowded clumps of the brown and withered hunch grass giving the appearance of hopeless desolation. To tenderfoot eyes it did not seem possible that cattle could exist on this scorched upland prairie; yet herds grew surprisingly fat on the cured tufts. The rolling swells stretched southward as far as the eye could see; on the east and the west two dark green lines, abrupt and definite, marked the diverging courses of the Jill and the Black Jack, and along the headwaters of these streams the greenery merged insensibly into the timber growth on the bases of the hazy mountains, tinted by the shimmering atmosphere into colors they did not possess.

Hopalong forsook the longer and pleasanter river trail and wagon road for the saving directness of the short cut, impassable for wagons; and had he looked behind him toward the town, he might have seen a thin streamer of smoke climb upward near the Why Not, change into two big balls of smoke, and die out. He rode as the crow flies for the ranch, following a path as straight as a plumb line until it reached the ravine of the Bull, a small tributary of the Jill, which flanked the plain on the east.

The Bull was now only a trickle, meandering along the bottom of a steep sided ravine. This ravine followed and cut through the middle of a high, wide ridge which ran between two flanking strips of swamp and slough, and its genesis would have baffled an observer not well acquainted with prairie lore. By all rights the ridge should have remained intact, and the course of the Bull should have lain through one of the sloughs. This freak of nature had provided endless arguments until the mystery had been solved by an old plainsman.

For generations the vast herds of buffalo had used this firm ridge between the treacherous swamps on either side for their road to and from fords of the Jill and the Black Jack. Literally tens of thousands of sharp hoofs had cut through the firmer bond of the top soil and turned it to dust, which the busy winds had carried away. Heavy rains, season after season had poured along this weakened line, cutting steadily deeper into the softer soil beneath, and scoured it ruthlessly, carrying it farther below the level of the surrounding ridge and then below the level of the encircling plain, until it now lay a deep and established water course, kept alive during the summer by seepage from the flanking swamps.

Like all such ravines, its banks were sheer, and the trail had been forced to enter it along another deepened buffalo path which struck it almost at right angles. In the spring it was swimming water, and Buck had threatened to bridge it, and thus gain a direct and short wagon road from the ranch to the town; but so far his threats had been harmless.

Hopalong pulled the little Texan pony to a more reasonable speed as they entered the bowlder-strewn approach to the ravine. Almost instantly the prairie arose above his head, while before him the narrow, twist-

ing trail pitched sharply downward. On both sides of him the insect orchestration lulled with his passing to swell into its full strength when he had gone by. In this trenchlike passage there was not a breath of air, and the sun scorched pitilessly. He wiped the sudden perspiration from his face with a sleeve and laughed outright at his weather predictions.

"Look out for th' blizzard," he warned his horse, holding it from a stumble.

As he leaned back with his weight on the reins something mottled flashed past his chin, to fall, twisting and writhing, beneath the horse's hoofs. The shrill rattle sent the pony into a panic and it leaped sidewise, struck the wall of the wash and then bounded down the steep trail in blind terror. Almost unseated by the unexpected jump, Hopalong tightened his knees and fought the crazed animal; and as they bolted across the trickling Bull, the ravine was filled with ear-stunning gunshots. The pony, suddenly relieved of its burden, leaped up the zigzag path along the farther bank, raced for a few hundred yards across the plain, and then calmly fell to cropping the plentiful bunchgrass.

Down in the bottom of the ravine the Bull backed up against the sudden obstruction across its course and murmured with relief as it flowed around the fleshy barrier. Hornets and jellow jackets, angered by the disturbance, hovered over the inert body, and then, reassured, settled back to their cool, moist clay.

Above the ravine there came the sound of trampling hoofs and then the swift diminuendo of rhythmic pounding. The gray-white smoke fringing the top of the bank like fog mists on a mountaintop dissipated, torn this way and that by the breeze of the upper level. The swift uproar of the sudden tragedy had died, and the ravine was silent again, save for the insistent humming and rasping of its insect inhabitants, and the hushed murmur of the waters of the Bull, now slightly tinted with crimson.

III.

RED CONNORS, his saddle mended enough to serve him, climbed over the bars at the corral and dropped his rope on a black gelding which had just been wrangled, and in a few minutes Red was loping along the Twin River short-cut. The black swept on with powerful stride, freer, longer and easier than the tied-in gait of a Texas pony, stringing the trail behind it and sending the heated air whistling past the rider's ears. Ahead lay the narrow, ribbonlike path, winding through small clumps of trees which fringed an occasional pool that now was no more than a patch of caked mud; angling up the sides of the steeper ridges, to run straight over the intervening level stretches. At length appeared a low, rugged line against the flat prairie beyond it, where the Bull meandered through its cut bank ravine. Something moved against this ridge, and Red idly noted it, and then sat erect. It looked like a grazing horse, and it looked as though it was saddled. The black leaped convulsively as the spurs bit in, and broke into a gallop.

"Judas Priest!" growled Red. "That's Hoppy's horse! G'wan, you damn earthworm: hit it up!"

The black did the best it could, which would have satisfied a less impatient rider, but to the man standing in the stirrups and leaning far forward it was not enough. He flashed past the grazing pony, his eyes darting every way over the plain; but he did not waste time up here on the level: all his interest lay in the ravine of the Bull.

It was customary among even the best riders to go down that northern bank at a walk and to ride alertly; but one glance into the ravine sent all Red's caution to the winds, and the black took the steep and treacherous descent on his bleeding rump, having lost his balance at the first drop.

Red sprang from the saddle, anxious solicitude turning his face into a graven prayer; but one close look drove a curse from him like a convulsive squeezing of a bellows, and the graven prayer turned instantly into the hideous gargoyle of murder. He whirled, Colt in hand, and searched the secretive rim of the ravine through eyes shot with red, blazing with blood lust and filmed with tears of rage and anguish. The first paroxysm of blind rage gave way to sanity, and the need for speed. He sheathed

the gun, swung the inert burden on a sloping shoulder and somehow gained the level plain, the torn rump of the gelding bobbing and scrambling ahead of him. He never clearly remembered that race to the bunk-house; it haunted him for years as a vast stretch of crimson fog, interminably long, damnably unreal.

His shout was not needed. Figures scurried like ants from the bunk house, the ranch house and the corral, to investigate that racing black and its double burden. The riders strung out according to the speed or perversity of their horses. From the rear of the dust-raising procession a chestnut poem of motion crept up on and passed horse after horse; its rider's arm rising and falling, the whistle of the quirt lost in the roar of the wind. Not a sound left the rider's tight-pressed lips; but his eyes glittered like those of a pitiless hawk.

The chestnut swung as though on a pivot, the frantic hind hoofs scoring the hard packed trail, the flailing forelegs searching the tenuous air for a purchase to aid balance: By a miracle of unconscious horsemanship the chestnut alighted on all fours, half a yard from the straining black, and kept pace with him. Now horse after horse stopped, swung, and joined the racing pair, profane shouts of inquiry turned to the dangerous mutter of vengeance. One crisp command rang out above the turmoil, and instantly an obeying rider shot from the group to break all records to Twin River and the doctor.

"Where'd you find him, Red?" snarled a voice ordinarily cold and calm. "Damn you, *answer* me?"

"On th' trail across th' Bull, kid," growled Red and then, wonderingly, saw the face of another man pop up before his eyes. Mesquite Jenkins, back from his wanderings, had dropped from Red's sight like a shrike from a treetop.

IV.

Dr. Judd, gently closing the door behind him, glanced around the ring of tense faces in the outer room. Behind him came the French Rose, her limpid eyes like pools of water overflowing. She struck the tears from her long, black lashes, and smiled bravely through the mist, her quivering lips bitten until they bled. To her side came Red Connors's wife and put an arm around her.

"Don't you fear, Rose," she said, her own lips trembling. "He ain't goin' to die: we won't let him!"

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Havin' th' constitution of an ox," he said, "he's got a fightin' chance; an' he's a fighter. Buck, fix me up a blanket on th' floor, somewhere. I'm aimin' to make this my office for a few days." He looked again at the circle of faces, each one a study in growing hope. "Is Mesquite Jenkins here? No? I'm sorry, for Cassidy's callin' for him. If he comes, send him right up here to me. Buck, before you fix that blanket, go in an' see him: he's got somethin' on his mind an' he won't stop frettin' till he gets it off. Th' rest of you boys clear out," he told them kindly. "We don't want no noise around th' house. Mrs. Connors, will you take Mrs. Peter's place for a while, so she can rest a little? I want her to sit up nights."

He motioned with his head, and man after man silently filed through the door, some of them groping a little, which might have been caused by the gathering twilight; but once outside, their purpose lost all uncertainty. Man after man ran from the bunk house, loaded down with rifle, blanket roll and canteen; the swearing cook bungled in his eagerness to pass out food suitable for men in the saddle who would have little time for cooking. He cursed monotonously, bemoaning the fate which had made him the cook instead of a rider of the range.

Buck pushed into the busy group at the horse corral and checked their activities, speaking harshly to hide the ache in his heart. Out of consideration for the wounded man's ambitious temperature, Buck had made a promise that was gall and wormwood to him; but, having made it, he was going through with every word of it.

Hopalong had made him promise to keep the outfit riding range to protect the cattle, and to leave vengeance to him or to Mesquite. If he died, then they could do what they pleased. Now Buck argued,

heated replies to his words slowly giving way to sullen ones, and he knew he would win, but the argument was to run a long time before he was to receive their definite promises.

The friends of Hopalong Cassidy did not take kindly to being called off the war trail; it was against their natures and their training, and but for their habit of obedience to Buck, a habit strengthened by many years, his words would have gone for naught; and as things stood it was a toss-up for whether or not they would obey.

Down from the north in the deepening twilight rolled a swiftly moving cloud of dust, the wind intermittently opening and closing it, and intermittently revealing Slick Milligan's pride in horseflesh; but the rider was not Slick Milligan. The sullen and mutinous crowd at the horse corral looked curiously at this skimming newcomer, and soon his identity was guessed at.

"Mesquite!" grunted Red, still smoldering in the fires of his rage. After a moment's intense scrutiny he spoke again. "Left th' chestnut at Sandy's, and borrowed Slick's bay." He raised his voice. "What's you find out, kid?"

Mesquite pulled up and stopped among them, swinging from the saddle as the horse turned.

"Lost their trail in th' river," he growled. "Not bein' able to pick it up till daylight, I went down an' swapped with Slick, an' come up to find out how bad Hoppy's hurt. How—how is he?"

"Doc says he's got a fightin' chance," answered Buck. "He wants to see you right away *pronto!*"

"All right; but before I go I want to warn you to keep this bunch ridin' range," hurriedly said the youth. "Looks like a range war. Heard enough in Twin River to make me figger they're plannin' a raid on you. With Hoppy laid up they're thinkin' it's mebby safe. Tell you more in a minute," and he whirled to run to the ranch house.

Mesquite stood in the big, outer room, his hat in his hands and his heart in his eyes, hypnotically watching the door through which the doctor had just slipped. The expression on his face would have justified a plea of self-defense by any man who had seen it and acted reflectively. The door opened again and the doctor's hand reached out and beckoned. Mesquite passed silently into the little room, nodded to Mrs. Connors with his gaze on the eager and burning eyes in the face against the pillow.

The pale lips moved and the youth stepped close and bent down until his ear was almost against them, holding his breath to aid his hearing; and the names of four men burned into his memory like a sizzling iron into the hide of a steer. He nodded and arose, and then hesitated as he was about to slip out.

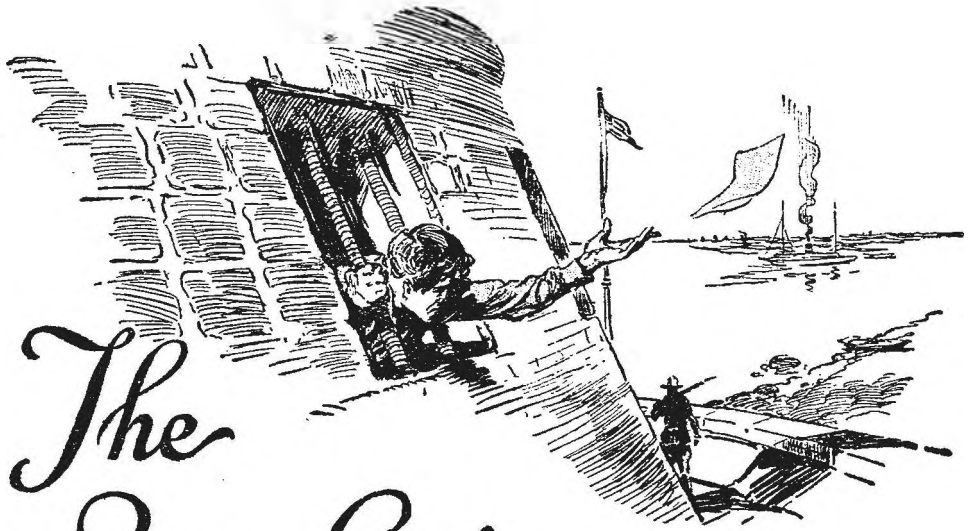
Hopalong was trying to tell him something with his eyes, trying desperately. Following their repeated glances, Mesquite saw the wounded man's twin Colts sagging their broad belts from a large nail in the wall. Pointing at them, he looked at their owner, and at the sudden light in the staring eyes a thrill went through him. Casting off his own belt and gun, he took down the worn forty-fives and slung the belts around his waist.

A few deft touches made them set snugly, and he turned a determined face to the pain-racked countenance on the pillow, over which a contented smile was now flickering. The youth nodded and backed swiftly from the room, dashing a hand across eyes that had not been moist for years, and ran for the corral and Slick Milligan's bay.

Back in the room he had left, the smile of Hopalong's face was growing softer and his eyes were closing. Dr. Judd looked closely at him, and from him to the nurse, and a finger went to his smiling lips. The nurse nodded, turned down the lamp and settled into a position she would try to keep without moving as long as her patient slept; and sleep he did, like a child. Mesquite Jenkins had come back, and was off to ride the blood trail.

THE END OF No. 1

NEXT WEEK: "THE RAIDERS."



The Sea-Going Elephant

By ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

Author of "Gold From the Cañon," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

A THOUSAND DOLLARS A HEAD.

THE Hyperion was steaming placidly northward about a hundred miles off the west coast of Mexico. A tropic calm lay on the mysterious Pacific. Flying fish leaped through the air like silver bolts shot from an arbalest. The air was cool, though the sun was a blinding blaze of yellow fire.

Under the awning aft sat Lexington Cuyler and his new found friend, who named himself Del Kegg. Kegg's complete first name, he had explained, was Delavan, but, as he was a companionable creature, he preferred the abbreviation. The two smoked aromatic Mexican cigars of gigantic proportions, and a box of them, carefully swathed in tinfoil, sat near on an inlaid Chinese tabouret.

Lexington Cuyler was a man of fifty-five who looked not over thirty-five. Tall, dark, lean, with beetling black eyebrows, a thin, well-proportioned nose, and intense gray-blue eyes, he presented an æsthetic figure. For over twenty years he had followed the long, long trail into the hinterlands of the world. He was by profession an ethnologist and ethnographer, and his many contributions to science were noteworthy. At present, in company with his daughter Kate, he was returning from a stupendous march to the northern tributaries of the Amazon, having embarked for San Francisco at Guayaquil, Ecuador. Kate Cuyler, however, had proved an indifferent seaman on this trip;

and, though delightful tropic weather had so far marked the passage, she had been unaccountably confined to her stateroom with *mal de mer* almost since the beginning of the homeward voyage.

Del Kegg had come aboard at Acapulco, Mexico, and immediately essayed the acquaintance of the scientist. He, too, he claimed, was a wanderer upon the face of the earth, having spent a great portion of his life in seeking animals and birds and reptiles for circuses and zoos. He had not been upon such a mission in Mexico, he divulged, though he was now returning to the States from a two-years' sojourn in that country. He had attempted, by way of variety, to run a little show down there, and had miserably failed. His outfit had been attached for debts, and he had ingloriously "ducked his nut," as he expressed it, for the Western coast.

He was very active for a man who weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. His hair was graying at the temples, and he looked to be somewhat over fifty. He had a good brow, a Bourbon nose, a short gray mustache, a sizable paunch, and walked with a sprightly little limp. He was companionable and loquacious in the extreme.

Lexington Cuyler was wrapped up in his work. To many he was a plain bore, for he talked of nothing but his discoveries and their bearing on evolution. But Del Kegg listened politely, and, it seemed, with genuine interest. Adventurer that he was, he longed to hear the explorer talk of the more material side of his wanderings — of the dangers he had encountered, the physical difficulties that he had overcome—but so long as Cuyler persisted in expanding on his theories of evolution the decamping showman lent an attentive ear.

But when the ethnologist began speaking of the noteworthy collection of shrunken heads that he had amassed in the outlands of Ecuador, Del Kegg's increased interest refused to be denied. Time and again Cuyler attempted to evade the subject and dwell theoretically upon the results of his march beyond the Andes. But Del Kegg demanded to know more about shrunken heads.

"Well," Cuyler at last gave into him, "I have twenty-five of these shrunken heads in my collection. I picked them up in the eastern part of Ecuador among the Jivaros, who are, even to-day, a head-hunting people. These heads, of course, are war trophies—the heads of the enemies of the Jivaros. The process of shrinking them to the size of an orange is this: The bones of the skull are taken out and hot stones inserted. The head is kept constantly turning, and as the stones cool fresh hot ones are introduced. The process lasts some days, until finally the head is reduced in size to that of an infant's, or even smaller. Then ornamental cords and feathers are attached to the closed lips and sometimes to the ears—and the trophy is ready for the head-hunter's walls."

"Are they rare?" asked Kegg.

"Very," replied Cuyler. "So rare, in fact, that by letter I have been offered a large sum of money for the collection I now have on board. I have accepted the offer —made by a friend of mine in New York —for, to be perfectly frank, I am about broke. My long trips into the back lands of South America have reduced my finances tremendously. I am contemplating another trip to China, as soon as my daughter has rested a bit, and I need this money for my expenses."

"You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Cuyler, that you expect to get enough for these here heads to set you and your daughter in China, do you?"

"Why, easily," replied Cuyler, his blue-gray eyes widening in mild astonishment. "And not only that, but I expect to have enough left over to outfit us for a year's trip into the interior of Tibet."

"My Lord! You don't say! I don't want to seem too inquisitive, but I'm always interested in the financial side of things like this. Would you mind tellin' me just what your friend offered you for these twenty-five shrunken heads, Mr. Cuyler?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars, if they prove to be according to my written description of them," said Cuyler.

The showman gave a low whistle. "Gosh!" he said. "That beats buyin' elephants and tigers, or tryin' to run a

medicine show in Mexico! And you're takin' the things to this bird now, are you?"

"Yes, they're in a steamer trunk in my daughter's stateroom," Lexington Cuyler answered indifferently. "As they now represent about all that we have in the world, we didn't like to trust them to the hold, with our other freight. In case of accident, you know, we might be able to get them ashore if we keep them handy."

"Sure! Sure!" agreed Del Kegg dreamily. "Don't blame you in the least bit. Good figuring."

CHAPTER II.

KATE CUYLER.

KATE CUYLER was a trim little body, even when pale and haggard from a spell of seasickness. She was a trifle below medium height, well proportioned, unquestionably pretty. Briskness characterized her every movement. She was as alert as a bird—full of life and full of "pep."

For five years of the twenty-three that she had lived she had traveled with her erratic father into all sorts of places. She could rough it with most men, and a glance at her was sufficient to advertise the fact that to try to "put anything over on her" was a waste of effort.

"But, dad," she told her father, "you ought to be more careful about telling everything you know to the casual acquaintances you make. You don't know anything at all about this Mr. Del Kegg, and—"

"But the man interests me immeasurably, Kate," Lexington Cuyler interrupted. "Why, he's been to—"

"It makes no difference where he's been," said the girl. "You shouldn't have taken him into your confidence and told him of the offer you have had for your shrunken heads. That's none of his business."

"But he asked me point blank, Kate," her father pleaded. "What could I say?"

"You could have evaded the question," Kate told him.

"I'm not good at evasion," was all that Cuyler had to say to that. "And, besides," he added as he left his daughter's stateroom, "Mr. Kegg is deeply interested in my work on prehistoric cultures."

The Hyperion was less than a hundred miles from San Francisco when suddenly, without the least warning, her old plates parted and she was half full of water before the leak had been discovered. Water-tight compartments were hastily closed, but too late. The strain of the volumes of water which had rushed into the hold and were welling up to the decks above caused more plates to spring. And half an hour after the damage was known the old tramp was sinking fast.

It was four bells, and the wheel and lookout had just been relieved. The night was black, for there was no moon. Suddenly the lights went out. The dynamo room had been swiftly flooded while the electrician in charge had stepped on deck for a breath of air. Then came the dread news, excitedly shouted by the ship's carpenter, who had started on his rounds to test the bilges. All was confusion immediately.

But the ship's officers had soon restored order among the tramp's few passengers. With their valuables clutched in their hands, men and women were herded into the boats, which were quickly rigged out on their davits and lowered. There was plenty of time and small cause for alarm. The steamer would remain afloat for an hour, perhaps, the captain informed everybody. The sea was calm, the shore not far distant.

Then to him came Lexington Cuyler, pleading that all he possessed of value was in a steamer trunk in his daughter's stateroom, and requesting that he be allowed to take the trunk along.

There were plenty of boats, and only the crew and a few passengers to occupy them. The request was granted, and Cuyler and a seaman carried the steamer trunk on deck and deposited it in the sternsheets of one of the boats. But in the confusion that followed the scientist and his daughter were separated, and neither of them was placed in the boat which carried the collection of shrunken heads.

Kate was in the bow of the first boat to shove off from the steamer's side. She had obeyed orders and taken her place when

commanded to, and was not greatly worried because her father was not with her. Her boat was rowed easily toward the distant shore-line, through the blackness of the night and over the long, oily swells.

Occasionally the girl heard voices from astern, and was assured that more of the steamer's boats were following closely. She had experienced so many near calamities during her travels with her wandering father that to-night's adventure did not perturb her greatly.

The seamen rowed for half an hour, perhaps, and then the boat began to heave furiously in the breakers and the occupants realized that they were nearing the land. Soon they were in comparatively calm water again; and shortly afterward the nose of the boat rasped its way up on the sand, and the bow oarsman sprang ashore with the painter.

Crew and shivering passengers scrambled ashore, and there was nothing to be done but build a fire for warmth and await the coming of another day. One by one the other boats made landings, some close by, others, farther up or farther down the coast.

Baggage was piled up on the sand above the high-tide limit. Men and women now joked and laughed as they made a circle about the blazing fire of driftwood which had been kindled. None of them had lost much because of the catastrophe, and all were thankful that it had occurred on a kind sea and so close to land. They hunted up their individual belongings, found coats and bedding, and wrapped themselves up for an attempt at slumber on the clean white sand.

Then came Lexington Cuyler, white faced, to his daughter and reported that he had been unable to locate the steamer trunk which contained the shrunken heads.

The captain and others joined in the search that followed. All of the baggage was gone over carefully without result. All of the boats were accounted for, and nobody was able to report that he had seen anything fall into the water during the passage from the steamer's side. Then the captain bethought himself to call the roll of passengers and crew.

There came no answer to the name Delevan Kegg when it was called.

A search was instituted for Mr. Delevan Kegg. Men were dispatched up the coast and down the coast, and others climbed the frowning cliffs back from the beach and searched the inland country. These, returning, reported that they had discovered a road, dimly marked, that followed the coast in a northerly direction, but that their lanterns had shown no footprints on it. The other search parties reported that they had found no evidences of Mr. Kegg whatever. It seemed that nothing more could be done about the matter in the dead of night, so the hunt was discontinued, and all of the disinterested parties curled up in their bedding and coats and tried to sleep. Only Kate Cuyler and her father sat by the fire and stared at each other across the blaze. And the girl did not reproach him when he muttered, with a long sigh of weariness:

"It's up to me, Kate. I'll never learn. I imagine that because I am honest every man I meet is the same. I've ruined everything with my babbling tongue!"

Kate rose from a suit case on which she had been sitting and passed around the fire to his side.

"There! There!" she tried to soothe him. "It's better to be that way, dad, than forever distrusting one's fellow man. We'll find your heads, don't worry. You and I will get busy as soon as it's light and get on Kegg's trail. They say it's apparently an open country back from the coast. Surely we can locate him. And if we fail to, we'll —we'll— Well, anyway, that's his suit case I've been sitting on. When we were hunting through the baggage for the steamer trunk I came across a case initialed D. K.

"Since I had failed to see any one answering to your description of Mr. Kegg among the passengers, I suspected him. So I appropriated his suitcase. We have a perfect right to it, it seems to me, since he has stolen our trunk. We'll go through it, and maybe get a clew as to how to follow him. But we mustn't let the captain know we have it. I'm going to scratch out the painted letters on it with sand. Too bad Mr. Kegg was obliged to leave it behind

when he hurried off into the back country with our twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of shrunken heads!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ORIOLE.

PETER VALENTINE LAVENDER, Real Estate, Rentals, and Fire Insurance, sat before his old-fashioned roll-top desk with his feet on the sliding leaf thereof and a cigarette between his lips. Pete's hair was inclined to kinkiness and terra cotta. His legs ran to length and his feet to breadth. His trouser legs were frayed at the bottoms from long hikes over a wooded hillside tract, called Lavender Manor, which he hoped some day to see dotted with summer cottages.

Just now Pete was broke, and on the desk before him lay his telephone, water, electric light, grocery, laundry, butcher, and other products of a hectic civilization in the way of monthly bills too numerous to even look at. Spring was manifest, and people were not buying real estate as they ought to buy real estate when spring is manifest. Pete's brow was accordingly wrinkled, but nevertheless he smiled. Pete always smiled. It had become a habit.

Also on the desk before the smilingly disconsolate real estate man stood a little hardwood frame—what might be considered a picture frame. But in it was no picture, and a rectangle of yellowing paper stared at the owner.

In length the inside of the frame was slightly less than seven inches and a half. Its width was about three inches and a quarter. To be brief, it was of the exact size to hold a piece of United States currency snugly.

Some years before Peter Valentine Lavender had sold real estate in southern California. His first sale after opening his office had netted him a five-dollar bill as commission. This five-dollar bill Pete had for sentimental reasons framed and set upon his desk, to show how slight had been the beginning of what he then believed was to be a great career. For sentimental reasons, also, he had left the framed Federal Reserve note on his desk day and night, never even taking the trouble to hide it in a drawer when he stepped out and left the office open, with a " Back in Ten Minutes " sign posted on the door. Peter had great faith in his fellow man.

But the project in southern California had died a gently gasping death, and Pete had wandered north. His smile had proved ample security for a little loan from the Bank of San Marino, north of San Francisco, and he had started up again in a little ready-built office that he had thrown together himself on a leased lot near the edge of the town. In the rear of the office, shielded by a curtain from the land seekers who did not call, stood the coal-oil stove on which he cooked his meals and the dry goods box on top of which he ate them.

That morning, on top of the dry goods box, he had eaten the last of the provisions that the mascot five-dollar bill, taken with much reluctance from its frame, had purchased. Now, as has been stated, Pete was broke, the little frame was empty, his feet were on his desk, his blue eyes were smiling, and he was wondering whether or not a prospective purchaser or renter of something would ever cross his threshold and leave a commission to fill the frame again.

Then she came, and he called her the Oriole.

She was about five feet three, and the three was the result of high French heels that sparkled black in the sunlight. She was dressed in orange otherwise — orange crape, Peter believed it was, though it might have been Georgette. Her hat was a little custard cup of orange, and her stockings were orange, too. Here and there was a little black to set her off, so Pete called her the Oriole because she looked like one. She was fresh and clean, too, like a bird—she had a scoured, polished, pumiced look, and there was no diamond ring on the third finger of her small left hand. She filled the little office with color and coolness and personality and faint perfume. She was about twenty-three, neither plump nor slim, distinctly feminine, and just about what a red-headed real estate man who cannot support a wife craves in the way of a wife.

" How do you do?" she accosted Pete, who, with desperate alacrity, had lowered one big foot to the floor and set the other one on top of it with clumsy cruelty. " I'm looking for a place to rent. I want a quiet place—very, very, very quiet—with lots of room, few or no neighbors at all, lots of big, shady trees, a cold running creek, if possible, big rugged rocks in the yard, a place for a little garden, no noise, no smoke, a marine view, birds and squirrels in the trees, no poison oak, furnished and with all the modern conveniences."

Peter looked at her gravely with his bright-blue eyes.

" I know just the place you want," he told her, " but, unfortunately, it hasn't been listed in this office. Besides all of the requisites you mention, the rent of this place that I have in mind is free. It's called heaven."

She laughed, and her gray eyes lighted. " I might dispense with a *few* of the things I mentioned," she amended. " But I must have big trees and quiet and remoteness. I—I—"

" Just a moment," Pete interrupted excitedly. " I've got the place you want—no fooling! Listed with me just yesterday. It's so new to me that I forgot all about it. It ought to strike you exactly, but you will have to put up with the owner's living on the property."

" I don't believe I quite understand," Kate Cuyler told him.

" Well, there's a comfortable cottage on the place," Peter explained. " There are the trees that you crave, the birds and squirrels—everything like that—except that the creek is missing. It ought to suit you fine but for the fact that there is a small cabin back of the cottage in which the owner wants to live. He seems to be a queer old fellow, but I doubt if he'd bother you. The cabin is perhaps a hundred feet from the cottage and screened from it by trees. He's a bachelor, this bird."

" What is the rental, please?" asked Kate.

" Twenty-five a month—light and power paid."

" I'd like to look at it at once."

" Er—could you walk? I haven't been in business long here and haven't bought a car as yet."

" I can walk," said Kate.

Peter Valentine Lavender put on his hat, took a key from a board with hooks screwed in it, on which hung other keys, and held open the door for her.

" My name is Lavender," he volunteered as he joined her outside—" Peter Valentine Lavender."

" And my name," Kate Cuyler responded untruthfully, " is Ethel Hubbard."

" Are you from San Francisco, Miss Hubbard?"

" Yes—at present."

Pete sighed with relief. She had not corrected him when he called her " miss."

" Will you be entirely alone?" was his next question.

" Yes."

" You won't be afraid up there in the woods?"

" Not in the least."

" No, you don't look as if you would be," he decided, looking frankly into her face. " Will you want the cottage for all summer?"

" Well, that I scarcely know," she hesitated.

" Because if you do," he added, " and if you'd pay five months rent in advance, you might get this place for twenty a month."

" I'll think it over when I see the house," Kate said.

They walked up a road of decomposed granite, lined with trees on either side. More of a lane it was, and very picturesque under the towering white oaks and black oaks whose leafy branches formed a canopy overhead. The lane climbed gradually. It was almost too narrow for automobile traffic.

They were silent as they entered the hills. Kate was drinking in the beauty of the winding lane, the friendly trees, and the occasional glimpses of live-oak-studded knolls beyond. They topped the hills after fifteen minutes' walk, and the broad Pacific was visible, rolling away to the farthermost ends of the earth, serene, blue. After a brief walk down the seaward slope Peter took to a wooded driveway that turned off on the

right; and presently he pointed as they walked around a turn.

"There she is," he announced. "As remote a place as one could want—considering that you've got gas, electricity, city water, everything in that line. And there's a bird over there—not a very big bird, I'll admit—but unquestionably a bird, or my zoölogical researches have been in vain. And, yes, by golly—there's your squirrel, Miss Hubbard! See him scampering up that redwood? That's the kind of a squirrel to have on a place when a real estate man is showing it to a prospective tenant who demands squirrels. Yes, sir, there's your squirrel, all right. And if things around here ain't 'very, very, very quiet' I'll be willing to spend the rest of my life in a boiler factory.

"And as for neighbors—find 'em! Here are your big, shady trees; there are your rugged rocks; there is your marine view; and as for smoke, there's not even a corncob pipe in sight. Can't guarantee the total absence of poison oak, however—but there is your little garden spot, by George! Guess old Zeal Sockett would let you putter around in it."

"What's the gentleman's name again, please?"

"Zeal Sockett, Miss Hubbard. He owns the place. Odd name—but no odder than old Sockett himself. There's his little cabin"—they had continued along the winding road while Peter expanded on the desirable aspects of the property—"and there's old Sockett himself, sunning his whiskers in the doorway. Want to speak to him, or shall we give the cottage the double-o first?"

"I prefer to see the cottage first," Kate answered.

They walked to the front door, and Pete inserted the key that he had brought along. Inside, he raised window shades and allowed the sunlight to flood the four small plainly furnished rooms. There followed a brief inspection on the part of the Oriole, and then she said abruptly to her companion:

"I'll take it, if you think his living in the cabin won't disturb me greatly. Let's see him at once and find out if he will reduce the rent if I pay for five months in advance."

CHAPTER IV.

ZEAL SOCKETT.

PETER VALENTINE LAVENDER ran his fingers through his kinky red hair, a gesture of embarrassment.

"Like a good real estate man," he observed, "I've told you about all the commendable aspects of this property and haven't dwelt on the objectionable. But I want to say right here that the man who lives in that little cabin looks like a pirate. I've never met him but once, you know—when he came into my office to list the property for rent. He may be a perfect gentleman, good to children and dogs. Maybe the worst thing he does is to carry violets to sick old ladies.

"But he wears a mug that I wouldn't trust as far as I could knock a box car with a tennis racket. Honestly, Miss Hubbard, I'm beginning to be sorry because I called this place to your attention. I wouldn't have any harm come to you for—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't worry about me!" Kate cut in. "I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, Mr. Lavender. And I like characters. Is this man a character?"

"He's worse than that," muttered Peter. "But come take a look at him. Then you can decide for yourself."

They discovered the object of their dialogue still seated in the doorway of his little cabin, over which green-leaved vines crept. He did not rise to greet his visitors. Instead, he sat and eyed them surlily as they neared him.

Kate Cuyler opened her lips in surprise as a closer approach revealed the characteristics of Zeal Sockett's face and figure.

He had a mat of wavy, coarse hair, dark brown in color, and sticking out in all directions from his head in flamelike locks. A stubby beard, of a shade a trifle lighter, flamed out from the lower portion of his face. The girl could not determine the color of the single eye which blazed at her, for it squinted at her through a slit, almost

entirely surrounded by hair. The other eye was sightless, and the lowered lid that hid it was as red as a birthmark. The teeth of the man were large and yellow, and when he grinned—which was infrequently—the pointed canines extended downward so far that they looked carnivorous.

This repulsive feature, coupled with the hairiness of face and head, gave Sockett an animal-like look. The flat, wide, negroid nose, added to all the rest, cause Kate mentally to name him Gorilla. His perfect brown arms, corded with muscles, were bare to above the elbows and were covered with tattoo marks. A huge silver ring of peculiar workmanship adorned one finger. She noticed by chance several days later, when the wind carried his heavy hair awry, that the lobes of his ears had been pierced. He was barefooted, with blue overalls rolled to the top of his calves, above which a cream colored shirt bloused comfortably at his waist.

This picturesque individual leered up at her with his one good eye and said not a word, but waited in patience to find out what it was all about, his stubby brown fingers clasped before him.

" How d'ye do, Mr. Sockett," began Peter Valentine Lavender. " Fine day, isn't it? I want to introduce you to Miss Ethel Hubbard, of San Francisco. Miss Hubbard is interested in renting your cottage for the summer, Mr. Sockett. I told her the rent was twenty-five a month, but that you might consider letting her have it for twenty, if she will take it for five months."

Zeal Sockett eyed the girl until she blushed and glanced away from his face. He then straightened one leg out before him, and rummaged in a side pocket of his overalls. Producing a square of black, hard tobacco, he next found a large jackknife and began whittling at the plug, dropping his gleanings in one palm.

" Fer five months, eh?" he remarked at last.

Then he replaced the plug in his pocket and, with the heel of one hand, began grinding his tobacco whittlings to the fineness necessary for smoking. This satisfactorily accomplished, he thrust his free hand inside the unbuttoned neck of his shirt and brought forth an intricately carved silver phial, about three inches in length, to which was attached a cord that was looped about his neck.

While his callers gazed wonderingly at the silver conceit in his hands, he said:

" That 'd be a hundred dollars, wouldn't it?"

" Yes," Peter replied.

Zeal Sockett took this information under consideration while he searched another pocket and brought out a black clay pipe, shaped like a cow's horn. Into the bowl of it he carefully tamped tobacco whittlings, and shook the remaining crumbs from his stubby fingers.

" An' you'd git five dollars *cumshaw*, eh?" he asked.

" Yes, five dollars would be my commission. I charge the customary five per cent."

The strange man eyed Kate once more, and the red eyelid that hid his sightless member fluttered. Then he removed the silver cap from the carved phial, poured a few drops of amber liquid on top of the tobacco in his pipe, screwed the cap back on, and dropped the phial inside his shirt again, exposing a great hairy chest in the operation.

He struck a match and puffed through the pipe stem. A blue fire glowed immediately, and the fumes of burning liquor and strong ship's tobacco took possession of the immediate atmosphere.

" Pay in advance, lady?"

" Yes," Kate replied.

Another long pause, while the foul smoke shot from the horn-shaped pipe in spirals.

" Well, s'pose you stand my, me stand you. You belong look-see Mary?"

Kate caught herself just in time. Not for nothing had she roamed the seven seas with her aberrant father. Zeal Sockett had asked her in a sort of pidgin English if she was a tourist, and she had nearly answered " No " before she could collect her wits.

" I don't understand you," she told him. " My name is not Mary."

Zeal Sockett chuckled deep down in his throat. It sounded like the growling of a dog.

"Ne'mind," he said. "Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it," Kate told him, and went through her hand bag in search of money.

She counted and handed him a sheaf of bills.

Sockett in turn counted it, nodded his head, and, producing a leather billfold, slipped the money into it.

"A-hem!"—from Peter Valentine Lavender.

"Oh, yes, young fella," Sockett observed, with a goblin grin. He took from the leather folder a five-dollar bill and laid it in Peter's hand. "Fix her up in there. Earn yer money. I can't be bothered."

"There'll be a fee of a dollar for the notary who acknowledges your signatures on the lease," Peter stipulated.

"We'll 'tend to that when th' lease is ready," said Sockett surlily; and then he gazed off toward the sea, puffing at his obnoxious pipe, and erased his callers from his thoughts.

Kate and Peter returned to the cottage, where Kate looked into certain matters, and then they started walking back toward San Marino.

"I hope he won't bother you," said Peter.

"He won't," Kate promised. "I'm not at all afraid of him. I think he's interesting."

"Humph! So is an orang-utan," Peter mumbled. "What in the dickens was that stuff he poured over the tobacco in his pipe?"

"Jamaica rum," said Kate.

Peter stared at her until she lowered her glance. "I wonder how you know," he marveled; but the girl did not enlighten him.

When they reached Peter's little office Kate promised to be over in two days to sign the papers and take possession of the cottage. Then she tripped out, an orange blaze in the bright sunlight, and walked to the little depot for her train.

In the office Peter Valentine Lavender was busily removing the back of the little frame that stood on his desk. He had received his first commission money since opening his establishment at San Marino; and, according to his code, it would be bad luck not to frame the five-dollar bill—temporarily, at least. To-morrow, perhaps, he would have to remove it again and pass it over some merchant's counter in payment for the necessities of life.

As he finished, the train came in, and through the window he saw a flash of orange as the Oriole ran up the steps of a car.

"I wonder what she wants to live up there for, all alone," he mused. "That girl has no business being alone. But my hair would never match that orange dress, so I guess we'll forget her, Peter."

But, just the same, he didn't!

CHAPTER V.

THE CLEWS.

ON reaching San Francisco by train after the sinking of the old Hyperion, Lexington Cuyler had found a telegram from New York awaiting him. It contained an offer by an Eastern scientific body for him to deliver a course of twenty lectures, beginning at the earliest date possible.

Also there awaited him a letter from a publisher who had accepted several articles, written by Cuyler, for publication in pamphlet form, to sell at twenty-five cents a piece. As Cuyler had accepted a very small amount for the articles, he had prevailed upon the publisher to supply him with a quantity of pamphlets in addition to the money paid. The letter informed him that eight thousand of these were awaiting his instructions for delivery.

"Kate," he had said to his daughter, when they had settled down in their hotel suite, "it looks as if things were coming our way after all. I'll receive not less than a hundred and fifty dollars a lecture, and that will mean three thousand dollars. And I am positive that at each lecture I will be able to sell my pamphlets right and left. If I can manage to dispose of the entire eight thousand, we will have two thousand dollars more. Five thousand—less our fare to New York and back and other expenses. We should not be obliged to spend more than a thousand dollars, and the remaining four thousand will set us in the heart of

Asia, where we can easily take care of ourselves."

"You may cut that thousand in half," Kate had told him. "Then we'll have forty-five hundred for our Asia trip. I'm not going to New York. I'm going to remain in San Francisco and vicinity and hunt for your shrunken heads. And I'll have them by the time your series of lectures is over."

Her father had tried to dissuade her, of course, but she had remained firm in her purpose to run Mr. Del Kegg to earth and recover the shrunken heads. He had laughed at the few clews she professed to have discovered in Kegg's suit case, but still she clung to her idea. So finally dividing what money they had between them, they parted in the train shed, wishing each other well and hopeful for the future.

Kate had at once returned to the hotel, where, locked in her room, she played detective over her clews again, with the result that she betook herself to San Marino and rented the summer cottage of the one-eyed man who called himself Zeal Sockett.

For when she went to Peter Lavender's real estate office it was with the full determination to rent the cottage if possible. She had not known, however, when she walked into the hills in search of Sockett's property that the cottage was for rent. But on the gate she had seen Lavender's "For Rent" sign, and had considered it safer to secure occupancy through him.

She reached her hotel room to-day rather late in the afternoon. But as it was still too early for dinner she seated herself and once more went carefully over the first letter which she had found in Kegg's suit case, and which had directed her to San Marino and Zeal Sockett. It was addressed to Kegg, at Acapulco, Mexico, and was terribly written and terribly composed. It ran as follows:

> Hello Del, how are you by this time. I am al right up here in the hills in the little place that i bought lately, and nobody bothers me at all. the boys are bringing in a lot of stuff these nights and i am hiding it in the place i told you about that made me buy this place in the first place. you know Del. Del, why dont you come back to the United states and get in with the gang. they are makin a pile of money and i am gittin mine believe me i would not stay down there in that god forsaken Spiggoty country any longer if i was you Del. there aint any chance of you ever gettin caught now as the dick that was chasin you is dead. come on back and git in the game. if you do, just sneak up to my place in the nite and we will talk matters over how best to proteckt you from John Law. run acrost the bay from San fransisko on a ferry boat and take the train for San Marino. then walk up the road that runs strait away from the deepo into the hills. when you are out of town you will pass three houses before you come to mine. then cross over the hill and you will see the oshun, and rite there on your starboard beam you will find my raft ankered. hoping to see your ugly fase soon i am
>
> yours respectfully
>
> ZEAL SOCKETT.
>
> Ps. Say Del I pretty near forgot the mane thing i wanted to write you about. we have at last located that beachcomber Yates and he has put a proposition up to us that will show us where the elephunt hid his cargo. you will understand i know. it is a funny case del and we need your magnifisunt branes to help us out. Yates is in prisun but i cannot write all about it as i dont write verry well and dont like to in the first place. come on up to the states on the next packet and i will spill it all into your funnel.
>
> SOCKETT.

And that is what caused Kate Cuyler to go to San Marino and lease Sockett's place.

Then there was another letter, addressed to Kegg at Acapulco, which was signed, Steyer Meebe, and postmarked Oakland, California. The text bore evidence that Steyer Meebe, Delevan Kegg, and Zeal Sockett were old-time partners in shady deeds of one character or another, and that the writer was a member of the gang of which Zeal Sockett had hinted in his letter. Meebe, it seemed, lived in an ark, anchored somewhere in San Francisco Bay. Kate meant to look up Mr. Meebe later.

She was fully convinced that Del Kegg had stolen her father's collection of shrunken heads. And, considering the information contained in the two letters, it seemed logical for him to hasten at once with his loot either to the ark of Steyer Meebe or the remote cottage of Zeal Sockett. Apparently, Kegg's story of the failing show in Mexico was a fabrication. He had been in hiding down there, and the letters from his friends had started him back for the

country of his birth. She and Kegg had never met, for she had been confined to her stateroom throughout the trip from Acapulco. So if he should chance to see her at Sockett's, he would know her only as Miss Ethel Hubbard.

Kegg, she reasoned, if he actually was at times a showman—which seemed entirely probable—would try to dispose of the shrunken heads to some member of his profession, to be used for exhibition purposes, unless he wanted to start a small show of his own and exhibit them himself. In either event, she thought, he would not attempt to dispose of the heads or bring them to public notice until considerable time had passed. Perhaps he hoped that Lexington Cuyler and his daughter would find some way to go to China and invade remote Tibet, in which event they would be out of his way for some time to come, and he could display the trophies without fear of being caught. And if her reasoning was correct, Kate thought that the collection was at that moment secreted either in Meebe's ark—which she had not yet found—or in the secret hiding place on Sockett's property.

So now for a sojourn in the cottage that overlooked the sea, and a great deal of detective work to discover the hiding place of her father's treasures. She had nothing else to do, no money to squander in the stores of San Francisco, and was saving expenses by not traveling with her father to New York. She had to live some place until her father's series of lectures was completed. Besides, Kate Cuyler loved adventure and thrills, and she looked forward with keen anticipation to her secret search.

Also, the boyish and impecunious Peter Valentine Lavender interested her immensely—just why, she found it difficult to say.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YELLOW PAPER.

THE groceryman whose bill lay of necessity unheeded on the desk of Peter Valentine Lavender owned a pleasure car — fortunate individual! He liked Peter, even though Pete owed him money. He wanted to encourage the young man so that he could pay up what he owed and buy more. So when Pete had a prospective buyer or renter who wanted something in a very remote part of the community, he frequently loaned Peter his car. Pete might have borrowed it to take Kate Cuyler to see Sockett's cottage, but he preferred to lengthen association with the Oriole by walking.

On the day following her advent into his life he had another prospect on the string, a man who wanted to see a small ranch five miles out of town. So Peter made bold to ask for the use of the groceryman's car, only to discover, after running it several blocks, that it was empty of gasoline.

Now Peter owed the garage where he frequently bought his gas exactly two dollars and a half. If he "sprung" the five-dollar bill that he had received from the Oriole on the garageman, he would grinningly keep all of it, for to-day Peter needed ten gallons, at twenty-five cents a gallon. So he must change that precious five and hand the fellow exactly two and a half, to cover the day's purchase, while laughingly informing him that he would "slip him" what he owed him in a day or two.

He already had taken the five-dollar bill from its frame on the desk, and it was now in his pocket. The prospective buyer of the little ranch had made it necessary for him to sacrifice his idealism a second time in his career. So now he climbed out of the stalled car, begged the prospect's pardon, and hurried on foot to the bank to change the bill into silver money, and buy and carry enough gasoline to induce the treacherous vehicle to run to the garage for more.

"Well, Pete," said the genial teller as the young real estate man leaned on the marble shelf at the bank, "guess we can't slip you anything for this one."

"Your joking mood," quoth Peter, "is in poor taste to-day. Slip me silver that I may hasten on my way to fame and fortune."

"Not for this piece of gun-wadding, Peter. She's phony, my son. Who pinned it onto you?"

" Phony! A counterfeit?"

" Yes, and a dandy, too, Pete. Look here—le' me show you. United States currency always carries in two places small, almost unnoticeable identification letters. They are A, B, C, and D, according to the series. Now bills of the A and C series always bear numbers that end in odd figures. And those of the B and D series have numbers that end in even figures. See that small letter there, Pete? I'll get a magnifying glass if you can't. A, isn't it?"

" Yes," said Pete morosely.

" And the number of the bill ends in an even figure, eight, doesn't it?"

" Yes," Peter admitted gloomily.

" And according to the rule, a bill of the A series should have a number that ends in an odd figure. So your counterfeiter, Pete, though making a mighty clever imitation, tripped up on that simple little—"

" Aw, forget it!" rasped Peter. " You're entirely too wise for this earth."

And, pocketing the offending piece of paper, he bulged through the swinging doors and trudged to the garage, where, with forced smiles and much slapping on the back he wheedled the garageman into extending his credit two-fifty more.

Peter was jubilant that evening as, back from his trip, he entered the little office. He had made a sale, and his commission was to be five per cent of six thousand dollars, which is three hundred dollars. It seemed like a fortune.

But his brow clouded as he seated himself before his desk and laid the counterfeit five-dollar bill before him.

It had come from the hand-bag of Ethel Hubbard, the Oriole. There was no mistaking the fact that she had handed Zeal Sockett a sheaf of bills to the amount of a hundred dollars. Poor, penniless Peter had watched them rather avidly as she counted them out. He was certain that she had passed her future landlord exactly twenty bills, which meant that all of them were fives. One of them Sockett had given to Peter. Were the other nineteen counterfeits, too? Or was this one merely a stray bill that she had picked up in change somewhere?

Pete Lavender was loyal to the people whom he liked. He did not for a moment suspect that Ethel Hubbard was knowingly passing out counterfeit money. But he wondered why a young, pretty, unaccompanied girl chose to live 'way up there in the hills, with a piratical looking old sea dog for company.

" Well, anyway," he told the bill, " you represent my first commission earned at San Marino, and back into your frame you go."

It did not occur to him to go to Zeal Sockett and demand honest money for his services. That might cause Ethel Hubbard to be taken to task by Sockett, and he didn't want to cause her any trouble.

" I couldn't spend it, anyway," he soothed himself, " for it must stay in the frame."

The Oriole came next day, and together they drove in the borrowed car to Zeal Sockett's place. They did not see the property owner as they approached his little cabin, but presently, upon drawing nearer, they heard a sound that amazed the girl, at least.

It was the slow clicking of typewriter keys.

Kate's amazement on hearing these sounds was caused by her knowledge of Zeal Sockett's illiteracy as revealed in his letter to Delevan Kegg. She looked at Peter to see if he too was surprised.

He was. " Think of that old pagan owning and trying to operate a typewriting machine!" was his comment. " But, then, maybe he's got somebody else in there who's pounding the keys. I'd think old Sockett would have as much use for a typewriter as a horse has."

It was soon evident, however, that Kate's landlord and no other was responsible for the clumsy pecking. For as they came abreast the door they saw him inside, seated at a little table, his bare toes clutching the rungs of his chair, his tongue out, and one stubby third finger searching for the keys on a little portable machine.

" Can you beat it!" marveled Peter Lavender. And then he lifted his voice: " Hello, there, Mr. Sockett! Here's Miss Hubbard to sign the lease. I've got a car

at your gate. I'll drive you down to the notary's office, if you're ready."

Sockett looked up from his work, plainly startled. He frowned at them through the door, rose to his bare feet, and carried the little typewriter out of sight. Reappearing immediately, he glared at them with his one fierce eye as if they had intruded on sacred ground.

Behind him, Kate Cuyler saw a piece of yellow paper rise from the table and sail away through a window in one end of the cabin. She shifted her glance instantly and saw the paper swooping down the hill through the trees, and eventually plastering itself against a massive trunk, where it hung for a little while and then fell to the ground.

But she held her peace about it.

" Gotta put on me shoes, I reckon," Zeal Sockett was grumbling. " G'wan out. I'll be wid youse chop-chop."

" ' Chop-chop ' is good!" observed Peter to Kate, as Sockett turned back into his cabin to slip into his bothersome shoes. " I guess he knows what he's talking about—I don't."

Kate did, however. But once again she refrained from speech.

They walked to the car, where they waited for the one-eyed gorilla to come to them. He came presently, rolling along at a waddling gait which was slightly interrupted in its top-deck swing by the unaccustomed shoes. Grumbling to himself, Sockett climbed into the machine at Peter's side, and Peter drove back toward San Marino.

In less than an hour they were at Sockett's place again, where, to Pete's surprise and chagrin, the girl decided to leave him and plan for her future occupancy of the cottage.

" You needn't come for me," she told him in response to his offer. " I'll walk in when I'm through. But you might have a truckman ready for me to-morrow morning, when I come over. There'll be only four trunks and some hand-baggage."

Peter promised to take care of her, and then drove away, leaving her walking toward the cottage with the key in hand. Zeal Sockett had preceded her out of the car and had hastened to his cabin to remove the cruel incumbrances on his feet.

Kate entered the cottage, and for perhaps half an hour sat thinking. The typewriter mystified her, and she wanted to know what was written on that piece of yellow paper that the wind had carried through the window of Sockett's cabin without his knowledge. She thought that she might be able to find it, and she meant to try soon.

Ten minutes longer she remained hidden in the cottage, then she decided that she had been there long enough to allay suspicion, if any existed in Sockett's mind. She went out on the front porch and locked the door. Then she went to the gate and started along the road toward town.

But as soon as she was sure that the trees were hiding her from Sockett's eyes she circled through the woods, rounded the hill to the north of the cabin, and stealthily worked her way back toward the property, watching carefully all the time.

Presently, through the foliage she saw the north end of the one-room structure which Zeal Sockett called home. She was more cautious than ever now as she approached the huge oak against whose bole she thought the piece of yellow paper had been flattened by the wind.

She reached the tree, peered guardedly around the trunk.

There lay the piece of yellow paper just where it had fallen when a shift of the wind had caused it to lose its transient clutch on the bark.

She lowered herself to hands and knees, and underbrush screened her from the cabin. She reached around the tree trunk, clutched the paper. Then on hands and knees she backed away, and made a hasty semicircle to the road before glancing at the object which she held.

Now, in the lonely lane again, she stopped and looked at it. A blank yellow surface stared up at her, but even before she turned the paper over she realized that it was a telegram.

It was a night letter, and a long one. It was dated, Seattle, Washington, May 1st, 1924. The adressee was Zeal Sockett; and his address San Marino, California.

Then in utter amazement Kate read the body of the telegram:

A handful of astronomer's delight tickles the musketeers. The pimple. Twice that Circle-A bunch got prison bars, but Jo threw a natural for what we need. The pimple. Prison bars hold the musketeers at Circle-A, and the tadpole supplies the musketeers with what we need. The pimple. What we get makes six gone wrong, and Jo lost a handful. The pimple. A handful makes six gone wrong on buckshot, and a head and body hang on the horizontal bar to the astronomer's delight in the first again. The pimple. The right-faced moon lights the musketeers and the tadpole twins.

"Merciful heaven!" she cried. "Why, the crazy thing! But wait! I've got it! A code message. Why, I'm a regular detective now!"

CHAPTER VII.

IVORY.

KATE CUYLER was at last comfortably settled in the little furnished cottage of Zeal Sockett.

She was not exactly afraid of her peculiar and ferocious looking landlord, but every night she slept with a .38 automatic pistol under her pillow.

For several days she rested and enjoyed the scenery of a land that was home, after her long wanderings in the south. She strolled all over the rugged, wooded country, following the many delightful trails that lured her here and there; and, remembering the hint in Sockett's letter to Delevan Kegg, she continually kept her eyes open for a possible hiding place of the shrunken heads.

Daily she saw Zeal Sockett sitting in the door of his cabin and dropping Jamaica rum into his pipe, or walking about and looking out to sea, as if every hour he expected the arrival of some mysterious argosy. He nodded his shaggy head and grunted when they chanced to meet.

But one day, with shoes on his calloused feet, he limped down the lane toward San Marino. Kate immediately started out in pursuit, following about a couple of hundred feet behind, her eyes on his enormous footprints in the dust for guidance. Assured finally that he was on his way to the village, she turned back, and, without a qualm of conscience, prepared to investigate his cabin.

She did not know just how far she dared to go in this proceeding. She recalled detective stories that she had read, and it seemed to her that amateur detectives had never hesitated over snooping about in the abode of the suspect when they were on the side of right — which they invariably were. Well, likewise was she—so she fought off her feeling of culpability and went ahead.

She discovered first that the single door of the little habitation was securely locked. There were three windows, one at each end and one directly opposite the door. Crackled green shades had been drawn down inside, so she could not see into the interior. One by one she tried the windows. All three of them were fastened.

None of them were double windows. Each was composed of a single frame, which was hinged at the top and lifted up inside. On the inside sill a wooden "button," which turned on a screw, served to keep each securely locked, simple though it was.

She could see by that portion of the sill which was outside that the board of which it was made was less than an inch in thickness. Studying the screw on which the button pivoted, she decided, considering the size of its head, that it was more than two inches in length. If this was so, it would protrude below the sill, for the thickness of the button itself was less than three-quarters of an inch.

The sides of the cabin were made of twelve-inch redwood planks, running up and down. Below the window that she was studying the planks were less than four feet high.

Now, she reasoned, if she could manage to remove one of these short pieces of siding under the window she might reach in and grasp the protruding end of the screw with a pair of pliers, turn it until the button was pointing the other way, and release the window. But she had no tool which was capable of removing one of the boards beneath the window, and no pliers. She would go

to San Marino at once, she told herself, and buy the necessary implements. Then she would be ready for the experiment the next time that Sockett left the premises.

She hastened to the cottage to change her clothes for the walk to town, and in the little screened porch at the back she found just the tool for prizing off the board. It was an iron instrument, shaped something like a lumberman's peavey, but with a handle considerably shorter. It seemed to her that she ought to know what this tool was ordinarily used for, but she did not take time then to think the matter over.

Why not find out whether or not she could remove the board without leaving traces of her work, and save herself the expense of a pair of pliers, provided she couldn't?

She hurried back to the cabin. Kate Cuyler had done too many things with her hands, surmounted too many difficulties which called for resourcefulness, to be stalled by a simple problem like this. Kate scoffed at women who professed that they could not use hammer and nails and a saw and an ax. She had been brought up in a different school.

She went to work, carefully prizing close to one nail at a time, so as not to split the board. She fulcrumed her tool on a stone and increased the power. In less than half an hour the board was off, and it could be replaced easily, and the nails settled back in their holes with a rock.

And now, to her vast surprise and satisfaction, she discovered something that she had not known before. The cabin was not ceiled inside. There was, then, no use for pliers at all, for she had only to crawl in through the twelve-inch cavity that the removal of the board had made, and investigate to her heart's content.

She went out to the road and ran along it toward town. She did not encounter Zeal Sockett on the homeward trip. So she ran back to the cabin and, stooping, twisted herself sidewise and was soon inside.

She stood erect, panting, and raised the window shade which was farthest from the road and her own cottage. With the rough interior amply lighted for her purposes, she looked around.

In one corner was a double bed, covered with red quilts. She gave this no attention. Neither did she inspect the rusty little cookstove, nor the common straight-backed chairs, nor any of the conventional furnishings of the little room. Her glance went first to the table, and when she noted that it held no typewriting machine nor papers, but only a few dirty dishes, she dismissed it as an object of interest.

Against one wall, however, was something that promised more. It was a little cupboard, with red curtains before it to protect the contents of the shelves from dust and the profane eyes of the curious public. Also, at the foot of the bed, stood a chest—a seaman's chest, she thought. She wondered if it were locked.

She pulled aside the red cotton curtains and investigated the shelves beyond them. On the first and second and third from the bottom were dishes and blackened cooking utensils, canned provisions, half a side of bacon, flour in a box, and other culinary requisites. But when she lifted her gray eyes to the top shelf she gave a little cry of surprise.

For up there was the little portable typewriter that had aroused her curiosity, and also a quantity of paper. But there was something else that now interested her far more. It was a pair of beautiful elephant tusks, about three and a half feet in length.

Kate climbed upon a chair and studied them closely. And now the heterogeneous information which she had amassed in traveling over the earth with her father stood her in good stead. She knew at once that the tusks before her were comparatively small. The elephant who once had considered them his property was, therefore, either a young African elephant or an Indian elephant. The tusks of the Indian species, she knew quite well, are only about half the length and weight of the African. Now to determine whether these ivories came from the head of a young African or a full-grown Indian. She did not know whether this knowledge would offer her a clew or not, but it would at least tell whether Zeal Sockett's former connections were in Africa or Asia—and a great deal might depend on that. Then, again, the

tusks might mean nothing at all so far as her investigation was concerned.

She ran through the papers on the shelf. They proved to be odds and ends of blank paper, suitable only for scratchwork. She could find no typewriting on any piece.

Jumping down softly, she drew the red curtains together again, then crawled out once more for a look toward the route to town. Seeing nobody, she again squeezed herself inside and gave attention to the chest at the foot of the bed.

It was a plain wooden affair, stanchly built, and showed signs of much traveling. It was padlocked, and that feature, for the time being at least, ended her investigation.

So, glancing about to make sure that she had missed nothing which might be of value to her in her search she crawled out again. Carefully inserting each nail in the hole from which it had been drawn, she used her prizing tool as a hammer, and soon the board was back in place.

Well satisfied with the progress that she had made, the girl went into her cottage and dressed for a walk to town. She knew that hardware men often had collections of odd keys, and that it was their custom to lend such collections to their customers so that they might find one to fit some lock whose key was lost.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEAMAN'S CHEST.

AS on her trip to town Kate Cuyler reached the real estate office and bachelor's quarters combined of Peter Valentine Lavender she was hailed by the occupant thereof.

"Hello, Miss Hubbard! How you getting along up there? Going down town? Step in a minute and I'll take you in my machine."

"Oh, you have a car now?" asked the girl, stepping close to his window.

"We have a car now," he told her gravely. "We have it for the time being, at any rate. We have made the first payment on it, and we are very happy. Won't you come in?"

Kate accepted the invitation. She was already warm from walking, and she liked to be clean and cool.

"I was going down to the hardware store," she informed him, seating herself in the chair that he offered.

"A laudable ambition, Miss Hubbard. I'll be glad to take you in about five minutes.

"I am going down for the mail myself. Expecting to see a fellow shortly, though. Wants to buy a bungalow over here. Say, do you know that you were good luck to me, Miss Hubbard?"

"I'm glad to hear that," Kate returned with a smile. "How so?"

"Earned my first commission money in San Marino because of you," he explained. "And since, it seems, things have started my way. Got a three-hundred-dollar slice the day after you came to see me. And I have several promising prospects on the string right now. Yes, I consider that I owe it all to you. And there's the commission money that I received from renting Sockett's cottage to you."

He pointed to the framed counterfeit five-dollar bill on his desk, and as she raised her slender eyebrows questioningly he told her of his fanciful practice in framing his first earnings in a new locality.

"Why, you're somewhat of an idealist!" she exclaimed. "You have the heart of a poet behind the breast of a real estate man."

"Don't you approve?" Peter asked, with some concern.

"I do," she replied. "But suppose your first commission had been a hundred-dollar bill instead of a five?"

"She'd have gone into the frame," claimed Peter. "And she'd have stayed there until hunger forced me to take her sorrowfully out and pass her across my groceryman's greasy counter."

He consulted his watch. "Guess that bird's not coming this morning. Anyway, he can wait for me if he does. Come on—I'll shoot you down to the marts of trade. And I'll wait for you while you match dress goods, and bring you back when you're through."

"You're very kind," Kate told him, not at all displeased.

Peter couldn't find his hat, but, stating that he didn't need it anyway, ushered her out to the decrepit little secondhand car that stood before his office.

"Aren't you going to lock up that framed bill while you're gone?" she asked.

"Not locking it up is part of the play," he answered. "I never even lock my office. I have the most implicit faith in my fellow man."

"That beautiful faith of yours is likely to get a severe jolt one of these days," the Oriole warned him as she stepped into the car.

"Oh, well — maybe not," said Peter. "Anyway, let us hope that it never does."

In less than thirty minutes they were back before the little office, Kate with a large bunch of keys of all descriptions in a paper bag.

"Just stay put," commanded Peter. "I'll take a look in the office to see if there is any evidence of that Jehu's having been here, and then I'll shoot you up the lane. Back in no time."

He returned almost immediately. He seemed rather more thoughtful than common as he screwed himself in behind the steering wheel. But he said nothing that explained his mood until he had helped her out before her gate.

Then he said: "Funny thing back there. Strange that you and I were talking about it so shortly before it happened. My mascot five-dollar bill, frame and all, has vanished. Well, maybe it 'll turn up again. Le' me know when I can be of service to you, Miss Hubbard. We give our tenants perpetual service over here. Rent a house on our list, and we try to take care of you for the rest of your natural life. Good-by. May I drive out some evening and chat with you on your porch? I'm something of a bore, but absolutely harmless."

"I'd be delighted to have you," Kate assured him.

She stood looking after the little car as he drove away. Then, as she was wondering whether or not it would be safe for her to make a try at unlocking Sockett's chest, she saw Sockett coming up the lane toward home.

Next morning, however, he took himself off again; and he was no sooner out of sight than Kate Cuyler was prizing out the loosened board under his cabin window. And as she used her strange tool her mind suddenly named it as she thought of the ivory tusks inside.

It was an elephant goad.

As she crawled in she saw the typewriter on the table, and beside it were sheets of paper. All of these were blank, she found on investigation, so she went to work eagerly at fitting key after key into the padlock of Zeal Sockett's chest. And finally, after she had tried many keys, the lock sprang open in her hand.

It was with a feeling of awe and guilt that she removed the padlock from the hasp and placed a hand on the lid to lift it. Then she imagined that she heard a faint sound, and her heart jumped up in her mouth. She waited, trembling, but heard nothing more. She laughed softly at herself and quickly raised the lid.

On top was a suit of black clothes, old-fashioned, carefully folded. Laying these aside with all due reverence for the owner's old-maid tidiness, she discovered a tray in which were all sorts of odds and ends dear to the heart of a seafaring man.

There were fids, of wood and metal, and a seaman's palm. There were trinkets carved in vegetable ivory, coarse embroidery work, a braided lanyard with a square-pointed jack-knife attached, a large harmonica, a number of dried seeds of the avocado—the juice of which seamen sometimes utilize for marking clothes—and many small novelties from foreign countries.

She gave these careful study, but learned nothing to her advantage from them. Now she removed the tray and set it on the floor, to discover more clothes, an automatic pistol, and a small box which she thought was made of camphor wood. Its top was crudely inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory, and silver. A small keyhole stared up at her, and for a moment she thought that her efforts had been in vain.

But when she pulled at the lid it raised immediately.

Inside she found letters, telegrams, and a few newspaper clippings. The telegrams were all couched in the same strange code that had already puzzled her. And to her deep chagrin she discovered that the letters were the same. One short note, written on a typewriter, brought a low laugh from her throat, so nonsensically weird was the text:

What we need from the musketeers is buckshot for the eyes and nose.

The tadpole twins left head and body behind prison bars a couple of times.

Prison bars and the sheik's saber found six gone wrong on buckshot.

Circle-A is what we need in astronomer's delight, for there are six gone wrong with Jo and the musketeers.

The eyes and nose of the musketeers are seen through prison bars, and Circle-A has a tadpole that Circle-A feeds buckshot.

Two sticks knocked the musketeers over the horizontal bar twice.

And another ran as follows:

A handful of astronomer's delight for the head and body is what we need.

The musketeers threw buckshot in a handful at the head and body behind a handful of prison bars, so the musketeers are what we need.

A handful of astronomer's delight tickles the musketeers.

The tadpole twins and the musketeers went to Circle-A with Jo, and the musketeers love Jo.

A handful and six gone wrong.

A handful for the musketeers gives buckshot

What at Circle-A is what we need, since the musketeers know what we need?

Six gone wrong in a flat balloon.

Twice that is astronomer's delight, and head and body of what we need for two sticks and Jimmy Hicks.

The sheik's saber minus the musketeers, divided by the tadpole twins, plus the musketeers.

In her notebook she swiftly copied several of these code letters and telegrams in shorthand, for as secretary to her father she had years ago made herself proficient as a stenographer.

There was nothing else to be studied in the little box except the newspaper clippings, and these, though decidedly interesting, puzzled her and whetted her appetite for knowledge of how they concerned Zeal Sockett.

The first that she read was as follows:

SOLDIER SENTENCED TO SEVEN YEARS FOR ASSAULT WITH DEADLY WEAPON

Tom Pleasant, a private in the ——— Company of Coast Artillery, was to-day sentenced to seven years' imprisonment at the Military Disciplinary Barracks on Alcatraz Island by a general court martial convened at Fort Jennings, California. Pleasant was tried and convicted for assault with a deadly weapon—a cook's meat cleaver—on a fellow kitchen helper in the company kitchen. He will be transported to Alcatraz Island at once to begin serving his sentence.

The second:

BODY OF ELEPHANT WASHED ASHORE AT CALM BEACH—NATIVES STARTLED AT FINDING HUGE BODY ON SAND

The citizens of Calm Beach were startled this morning when they awoke and saw the body of a huge elephant washing about awkwardly at the edge of the water. On investigation it was discovered that the dead animal's tusks had been recently sawed off. The body was slightly decomposed, and there was a short chain about one great foot. It was estimated that the weight was over three tons. All sorts of fanciful stories were going the rounds—some maintaining that the huge carcass had floated entirely across the Pacific from Asia—the more conservative holding that some circus had lost the animal. Then somebody recalled that a steamer, bound from Asia to the United States with a deckload of animals for a San Francisco Zoo had recently lost the greater part of her cargo by reason of the tropics-loving beasts having been chilled to death during the trip across the ocean, and that an Indian elephant had been one of the number that failed to survive. This settled the mystery, greatly to the disappointment of many, and Mayor Kirk ordered a launchman to tow the elephant out to sea again, as his presence on the beach was fast becoming a nuisance.

All this was highly absorbing and quickened the pulses of the girl. There were more clippings that she wanted to read, but she found that she was growing excessively nervous over the realization that she had already spent a great deal of time in Sockett's

cabin. So, regretfully, she replaced everything as she had found it, relocked the chest, and made a hasty retreat through her secret entrance. There would be another day, she told herself, as she went to her cottage. And in the meantime she would continue her efforts at trying to discover the key to the code in which Sockett's telegrams and letters were written.

As she entered her house she saw Sockett walking along the driveway from the front gate. Her heart almost stood still as she realized how narrow had been her escape from being caught.

CHAPTER IX.

ZEAL SOCKETT ENTERTAINS.

KATE CUYLER sat alone on her conventional little front porch that evening as the sun was going down. On a small table by her side were her shorthand copies of the letters and telegrams addressed to Sockett. She was puzzling over the code and the unique discoveries of the day.

There was one thing certain in her mind. That was that the newspaper clippings undoubtedly pointed to the man Del Kegg and conclusively linked him with Zeal Sockett. Kegg, her father had told her, was by profession a buyer of rare animals for circuses and zoos. But Kegg had not appeared since she took up residence on the place, and she seemed no nearer to locating her father's shrunken heads than when she had first started her search for them.

The code mystified her. It seemed impossible for her to find the key to it. But there was one noticeable feature about the communications that started a line of thought: All of them were typed, and, as has been stated before, it struck the girl as decidedly peculiar that a man of Sockett's kidney should own and operate a machine. Could it be possible that a typewriter was necessary to the use of the strange code?

She sat up straight suddenly, as does one when he is struck unexpectedly with a great idea. She was on the right track, she firmly believed, She had noticed the name of Sockett's portable typewriter. It was fitted with what the makers characterized as Keyboard Number 20. It was a double-shift machine, and— She rose to her feet in her excitement. The great idea was born. She would procure a similar machine next day—go to San Francisco and rent one—and before the advent of another night she expected to be able to decipher the code. She would—

Her impetuosity turned suddenly to a feeling of weakness as she heard a step at the corner of the cottage. She had just time to sweep up the clippings and shorthand copies and crowd them into a pocket of her apron when Zeal Sockett staggered to the steps and stood swaying before her.

One glance was sufficient to convince her that he was very drunk. His single fierce eye blazed at her in what he doubtless considered a companionable look, and the red skin that covered his sightless eye quivered with some great emotion that he seemed to feel. He was barefooted, as usual, and the little silver phial that contained his Jamaica rum was hanging outside his shirt. His shaggy hair and beard stood out about his face like ruffles. A hideous smile displayed his yellow, simian tusks.

"Well," he asked thickly, "how's th' little girl this evenin'? I'm lonesome, I am, an' I thought, seein's you an' me is 'way out here in th' jungles together, we might be a little sociable. Can do?"

Kate was not greatly frightened, merely startled. Sockett didn't look dangerous at all. The fearsomeness of his face was a natural misfortune. His voice, though gruff, did not convey the impression that he was in a nasty mood. She might be able to worm something out of him, considering his present condition. So she said nothing as he seated himself, with a heavy sigh, on the top step of the porch.

"Get lonesome when I'm drinkin' 'way out here alone," he professed. "The first day er two, anyway. Then when I been hittin' 'er up for a week er more, I git so's I don't care whether I see anybody er not."

He squirmed sidewise and took from a pocket the harmonica that she had seen in

the small camphor-wood box inside his chest.

"I'll give you a little tune," he offered complacently, in a tone that conveyed the idea that her refusal to listen would be an unheard-of thing.

He screwed his great brown hands into a knot about the instrument; and for five minutes the most doleful strains assailed the girl's ears that she had heard since listening to a funeral dirge in the South Sea Islands. He finished finally and puffed for breath.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Fine!" Kate encouraged him.

He looked at her gravely through the twilight. "I think you're lyin' just to be polite," he said. "More better you muchee bobbery my. How'd you like to hear me sing?"

"I'd be delighted," Kate said.

"How fashion?"

Though his pidgin-English would have been to most people as uninterpretable as his strange code messages, the girl understood him perfectly. But she was wary. She held her peace.

"I'll sing ye a song that means somethin'," he told her finally. "To me, anyway. Listen here."

And in a low, husky voice he rendered the following:

Oh, the animals came up two by two—
  Kid thyself no more.
They were traveling far to the Frisco zoo—
  Oh, kid thyself no more, my lover—no more!

Oh, we steamed away from Hangchau Bay,
  And the sun was hot above.
The elephant tossed his new-baled hay,
  And the baboon loved his love.

Oh, we steamed so free up the Yellow Sea,
  And the sky was clear and blue.
The old giraffe he had to laugh
  At the tale of the kangaroo.

Oh, we steamed so free up the Yellow Sea
  Till we came to old Chefoo.
And on the back of the hairy yak
  Sat the lovin' cockatoo.

Oh, back steamed we o'er that Yellow Sea,
  For Nagasaki cleared.
And the lion smiled at the emu's child,
  And the wart-hog stroked his beard.

Oh, Yokohama saw us now,
  And sky and sea were blue.
The owl's best girl kissed the flyin' squirrel,
  And the ant-bear kissed the gnu.

Oh, happy ostrich, happy hawk!
  Oh, happy cobra, glad baboon!
Oh, happy muskrat, wildcat, wombat—
  Death will overtake you soon!

We steamed away o'er the ocean wide,
  For Frisco town we steamed.
And the sun was gone and the storm came on
  And the phosphorescence gleamed.

And down from the north comes the cold north wind,
  And down from the north comes ice,
And the jungle folks have left their cloaks
  In the land of tea and rice!

Oh, the zebra's stripes were out of date,
  And the wart-hog's warts turned blue;
Oh, one big cough and the stuff was off
  With the shivering cockatoo!

Oh, the tiger opened his mouth to sneer
  And his mustache froze to his knees.
The half-stiff crew saw the kangaroo
  Leap up in the air to sneeze.

Oh, the boa constrictor climbed the stack
  To warm himself with vapor.
And the crocodile, with a frozen smile,
  Struck a match to light the tapir.

Oh, one by one they laid them down
  Upon the deck and died.
The elephant alone lived on,
  So thick, so thick his hide!

Away we steamed for Frisco town,
  And ever in our wake,
An animal bobbed up and down,
  A bird, a lizard, or a snake!

Oh, 'round our stack the frozen snake,
  Which no one could pry off!
The elephant on the forward deck
  Would sneeze and snort and cough!

"Oh, make his belly warm!" they said.
  "Oh, tie his throat up tight!
Oh, give him lemonade and gin,
  And cough-drops every night!"

"Oh, save our noble elephant!"
  The skipper begged the crew,
"For all the jungle folks are gone
  But him; he must pull through!"

But the elephant he switched his tail
  And raised his low-bowed head,
And coughed straight in our skipper's face—
  And both of them fell dead!

We sawed the noble tusks off short.
  We stole the skipper's ring.
We pushed them sadly o'er the side,
  And chantey songs did sing!

Oh, the animals came up two by two—
Kid thyself no more.
They were traveling far to the Frisco zoo—
Kid thyself no more, my lover—no more!

"What d'ye think about that?" he asked soberly, as he finished in a melancholy key.

"It's rather interesting," Kate truthfully replied. "But I'd like to know what it's all about, Mr. Sockett."

"So would a lot of 'em," he gravely informed her.

"Did you compose it?"

"Me make it up?"

"Yes."

He studied over his answer. "No," he admitted at last, "a friend of mine he made her up. We was all drinkin' in th' eyes of 'er one night, and it was then he made 'er up. We all learned 'er, and every time we'd git to drinkin' together somebody would start 'er up, and then we'd all jine in."

"But why did your friend compose such a song?" the girl prodded. "There must have been some occasion for it, wasn't there?"

"There was—there sure was some occasion, ma'am. With every kind of an animal ye could think of dyin' on ye right an' left till th' ole packet smelled like a slaughter house, wouldn't ye think there was some occasion for a song like that?"

"Were you one of the ship's crew that brought such animals to the United States, Mr. Sockett?"

"I was, ma'am. I was the noble bo's'n. Say, we had over seven thousand animals and birds and reptiles on th' deck o' that poor ole packet, an' when we docked in Frisco there was less'n three hundred of 'em alive. Whew!"

"What killed all of them?"

"Th' weather, damn it—th' weather! Why didn't ye listen to me song? Didn't th' song say th' weather killed 'em? Ye can't take a lot of animals an' things outa th' jungles o' Asia and tie 'em up an' cage 'em up in weather that's runnin' around thirty degrees. They was jest naturally chilled stiff, ma'am—and—they jest naturally croaked, that's all. Th' keeper was drunk from Nagasaki to Frisco on square-face gin, and th' poor rag-top that he had to help 'im didn't know what to do. He'd go moochin' around to everybody sayin', 'Oh, master! Oh, master, they die—they die!' But, hell, all of us was drunk, from th' skipper down an' we paid about as much attention to that Hindu as the frozen boa constrictor did. He was a busy bunch, ma'am."

"What kind of animals did you lose on the trip, Mr. Sockett?"

"All kinds, damn it! Giraffes, monkeys, big snakes, birds, two bulls, some kind o' deers that they had — I don't remember what all. Owner hadn't been able to insure them for th' passage. Even Lloyd's wouldn't take a chance."

"What did you do with them after they had died—the elephants, for instance?"

"Heaved 'em over th' side—what else could we do with 'em? Some job movin' them elephants, too. She was blowin' to beat hell, and we lost one man o' th' crew overboard when we was tryin' to push one o' them bulls over th' side."

"How long ago did this happen, Mr. Sockett?"

"'Bout a year ago. No, it was last August—'bout nine months ago, more or less. But I'm gonta sing ye another song. Listen!"

Zeal Sockett's second number was equally weird and doleful, but altogether unimportant to Kate Cuyler. She waited patiently until he had finished, then commented favorably on the entertainment, and asked for more information about the animals.

The name of the steamer, she learned, was the Vigilance, her skipper's name, Dan Crary. But the effects of the preliminaries to Zeal Sockett's debauch were wearing off, and he was growing restive. He became sullen, replied to her questions in monosyllables, and finally, stating that he was in need of a bracer, got to his feet and started off.

"But did the boa constrictor actually climb the stack?" asked Kate.

Sockett made no reply until he reached the corner of the cottage. Here he paused and looked back.

"Some claimed he did and some claimed he didn't," he said solemnly. "Th' carpenter saw 'im and pointed 'im out to th' second mate. But th' second mate wanted

to know how th' boa constrictor could git up there when there was already two wart-hogs, a zebra, an' three gorillas settin' on th' braces o' th' stack, playin' stud poker. Th' second mate said there wasn't any room for th' boa to climb th' stack. I was helpin' a dead caribou over th' side at th' time, sister, so ye can't prove nothin' by me."

And he stalked away without bidding Kate good night.

CHAPTER X.

THE CODE.

FOR several days, now, Kate saw Zeal Sockett only infrequently. He was drinking heavily all of this time, she believed, for at night she often heard his voice raised in some weird sea song in a decided minor key. Occasionally he played dolefully on his harmonica. He did not molest her at all, and not once again during his spree did he come to her cottage; but she was worried and constantly on the alert for a visit from him.

Meantime she had rented a portable typewriter exactly like the one he used, and was confident that she was slowly but surely unraveling the code.

It had occurred to her that, since a typewriter was always used to write the messages, a typewriter was necessary to the code. The letters on this particular machine, when the keys were operated without the shift key being pushed down, were as follows:

q w e r t y u i o p
a s d f g h j k l
z x c v b n m , -

But if the shift key was locked, whereupon the upper characters would print, the result would be this:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
@ $ % ! — * / = #
( ) ? ' " : ; . ¢

Now, considering that the writer wished to indicate letters by using figures and characters on his machine, he would press down the shift key and, forgetting that it was down, write his message with the necessary letters in mind. Therefore, since the Q key contained the figure 1, a figure 1 would appear on the paper when he tapped the Q. W, then, would be represented by 2; E by 3; R by 4, and so on. In the next line, when the operator pressed the A key, with the shift down, the machine would print the character @. S would be represented by the dollar sign ($), and so forth. So if, for instance, the operator wished to write "John Brown" in code, he would lock the shift key and proceed—j o h n b r o w n. But what would appear on the paper would be / 9 * : " 4 9 2 :

Now, accepting the belief that each of these characters and figures on the machine had a name other than its own, the writer of the message would next transpose characters and figures into the names that had been given them. Suppose, then, that this character /, which was on the J key, should be called "one stick." Then the writer who was putting "John Brown" on paper in the code would begin his sentence, "One stick," which would stand for J. The next letter being O, and the figure 9 being before him to represent O, if the figure 9 were called, for instance, "Six gone wrong"—which Kate firmly believed it was—the sentence would progress to, "One stick six gone wrong." The connecting word "and" would probably be inserted, but would have no significance, so that the first two letters of the communication would read, in code, "One stick and six gone wrong." On the H key was a star (*). "Astronomer's delight" had appeared many times in the messages which she had read. It was logical to assume that "Astronomer's delight" was the secret name that had been chosen for the star, or asterisk. The three letters then would read, with "for the" added to confuse the reader for whom the message was not intended, "One stick and six gone wrong for the astronomer's delight." The N key, when struck with the shift key down, produced a colon (:). She had noticed the word "buckshot" appearing frequently. The two dots that composed the

colon, one above the other, might well be called buckshot. So now the word "John" would read, in the code, "One stick (and) six gone wrong (for the) astronomer's delight (in) buckshot."

She firmly believed that she was on the right track. "The pimple," she was sure, meant a period, and necessary only in telegrams. So she carefully went over the messages, trying to discover what names the code-senders had given to the various characters. The exclamation point (!) she decided went under the name of "The flat balloon." "Head and body" meant the figure 8. The figure 6 was "Jimmy Hicks" of crap-shooter fame; the double quotation mark (") was "The tadpole twins"; the dollar sign ($) "What we need"; and the zero mark (o) "What we get." Five (5) became "A handful"; the equals sign (=) "Two sticks," and the per cent character (%) was "Eyes and nose." It was unique and interesting, and the man who had formulated the code was decidedly not lacking in imagination.

The result of her efforts was that, three days after she began work on the problem, she was able to interpret the telegram that had come from Seattle to Sockett as follows:

The Walrus leaves port to-night. ZEB.

Then slowly, laboriously, she deciphered the other messages. The result in the case of one of them was:

This entitles the bearer to five cases of Scotch whisky. Meebe.

And the other one read:

Send Bill Lemon ashore quick. Delevan Kegg.

Steyer Meebe, she recalled, was the name signed to one of the letters that she had discovered in Kegg's suit case. He lived in an ark in San Francisco Bay. Wasn't it about time for her to be looking up this man Meebe? She had hoped to find time to locate him long before this.

She leaned back in her chair and rested from the brain-racking task of deciphering the messages.

So the gang that Zeal Sockett had referred to in his letter to Kegg was merely a rum-running outfit, after all. The order for five cases of Scotch whisky pointed to that modern pursuit. And the Walrus was to leave port to-night, according to the wire sent by "Zeb." The telegram was dated May 1, and to-day was the 9th. The Walrus had doubtless anchored off San Francisco Bay several days ago, with her cargo of rum, provided she had not met with misfortune.

"Now," thought Kate, "where is all this getting me? I know that Sockett, Meebe, Zeb—whoever he may be—and now probably Del Kegg also, are engaged in running rum from Canada and delivering it in an American port. I know that of the members of this gang Kegg and Sockett, at least, were connected with the shipment of unfortunate animals from Asiatic ports to San Francisco in a steamship named the Vigilance. But how does all this help me to find what has become of dad's shrunken heads? I'm getting nowhere at all, it seems."

Watching the movements of Zeal Sockett had brought no result. He had hinted in his letter to Kegg of a secret hiding place somewhere on the property which he owned. The illicit cargoes of the Walrus were probably stored there too, to be distributed to retail bootleggers later on. But, though she had watched the strange man many times, she had found out nothing at all about this mysterious cache.

A new thought occurred to her, which gave her a grain of encouragement. Sockett was drunk—had been so for several days. Yet she was almost sure that he had not left the property to procure his liquor. Neither had he been seen by her very far distant from his cabin. Could it be possible that the cache was in the cabin—that she had overlooked some door or other entrance leading to it? She would make a more thorough search the first time he went away again. But, with Sockett under the weather alcoholically, there was no telling when he would cram his feet into his shoes and sally forth into the outside world.

She looked up suddenly as she heard the sound of an automobile at the gate. It was then mid-afternoon—just about the hour that a red-headed real estate man with

the soul of an idealist would chose in which to call on a dark-haired girl with gray-blue eyes, who lived all alone in the redwoods and madrones.

But it was with a little sigh of disappointment that she saw two strange men walking along the drive toward her. Neither of them had red hair.

From behind her curtains she studied them. One was a slight, lean fellow, dressed roughly, and with a tanned, weather-beaten face. The other was a decidedly heavier man, weighing perhaps twice as much as his companion. He had a paunch; his hair was graying at the temples; his nose was of the Bourbon type; he had a stubby gray mustache; his clothes were neat and accurately tailored to fit his corpulent figure. A good-natured smile beamed on his face; he carried a cane; and— Kate drew back quickly, breathing hard. *He walked with a little limp.*

Delavan Kegg at last! This character answered perfectly to the description of the animal man that Lexington Cuyler had given his daughter. Was his wispy companion the fellow who signed himself Steyer Meebe?

The pair did not even look at her cottage as they neared it. They passed it and continued on toward the humble abode of the one-eyed singer of songs. At the door they stopped, and a fist was lifted to tap on the panels.

Then Kate jerked on her hat, slipped out at the front door, ran to the gate, and continued on toward San Marino at a dog-trot.

When the wooded lane had led her to the door of Peter Valentine Lavender's real estate office she came to a halt and waited until her panting had ceased. Through the window she saw the red head of her new friend bent over his desk. He had not seen her. Now she stepped to the door, opened it, and walked in.

" Good afternoon, Mr. Lavender," she greeted him. " I came to see if you were in earnest the other day when you told me that you and your car were always at my service."

Peter looked up, blinked his bright-blue eyes. The Oriole had flown to him again.

" I was never more serious in my life, Miss Hubbard," he reassured her. " I—"

" I'll pay for the gas and—and whatever else you want," she interrupted. " I need you and your car right now, for I may not have time to hire one."

" You will pay for no gas or whatever else I want," he told her. " For there's nothing else that I want except to be of service. Where do we go from here?"

" A car drove up in front of my place a little while ago," she explained. " Two men got out. I—think I know one of them —slightly. I—I have decided to follow them when they leave. Can you take me and—and do that?"

" You bet I can! They'll have to pass this office on their way out—no other route. You and I'll be sitting in the old bus, and when they ramble by, *bingo!*—they're it! But—er—none of my business, of course, but—well, just but, I guess."

" It's something that I must not explain, just now, at least," said Kate. " Anyway, it's all right, even if it does seem peculiar. If you'll just— Listen! Isn't that a car coming down the lane now?"

Peter cocked his head on one side to listen.

" Sure is," he opined. " Get in my car quick! Where's my confound' hat? Never mind—don't need it, anyway. Make me baldheaded before I'm ninety-five if I wear it too often. Run!"

She hurried out ahead of him to the car and fumbled at the door. He reached her and opened it for her, shoved her in, and hastily twisted himself to the seat beside her.

" Lean down, or something," he advised, " so they—"

" Oh, they've never seen me," she assured him. " Just act naturally. Step on your starter and swing in behind them when they pass us. Then follow them wherever they go."

" Right!" Pete agreed; and just then a big car emerged from the lane and continued on the road to the heart of San Marino.

" That the outfit?" Peter asked.

" Yes."

" Their name is mud," quoth Peter; and

the wheezy little car set out after the larger one, about sixty feet in the rear.

CHAPTER XI.

SERVICE.

"WELL," remarked Pete Lavender as, after a seventeen-mile run along the State highway, his car fell in behind the bigger one before the Sausalito ferry, "it begins to look as if I am due to go to San Francisco without a hat."

They had experienced little difficulty in keeping the big car in sight throughout the trip from San Marino to Sausalito. They had taken its number early in the chase, and if another machine chanced to get between them they always were able to pick up the quarry again. Now they stood stationary directly behind the other car in a line of automobiles waiting to board the ferry for the city. Peter got out and followed the lean man to the ticket window, then hurried back to Kate.

"I got tickets," he informed her. "We'll stay with 'em till the crack o' doom. But they may keep us guessing when we get into the traffic across the bay. Wish I had my confounded hat along. I seldom wear the thing, but I miss it when I don't know where it is."

"I suppose," said Kate, "that you're terribly curious over what this is all about."

"Well, I haven't pestered you, have I?"

"No, you've been very good. I have been wondering all through the trip down here if I hadn't better take you into my confidence. I'm a woman of mystery, Mr. Lavender. You know that you have been wondering, ever since I rented old Sockett's house from you, why I chose to live away out there in the woods. Haven't you, now?"

"I'm beginning to believe," he told her, "that you had a secret motive in renting that cottage."

"I had," she confessed. "I intended to rent it before I went into your office and described it to you. I had already looked it over from the outside, and had seen your sign nailed to a fence post."

"Why all the mystery, Miss Hubbard?"

"I just thought it best to be secretive. I'm a woman, you know, and we love mysteries. I thought it might arouse suspicion if I rented the cottage direct from the owner."

"Then it's old Sockett who interests you?"

"Yes; I'm watching him—for a purpose. But really I mustn't tell you any more."

"Just why, now?"

"Well, maybe I like being a mystery. Maybe I'll tell you more when things have developed a little further. I may need your help. Can I count on you?"

Peter was assuring her that she emphatically could, when the line of vehicles ahead of them started to move. And shortly afterward, nose to tail with the big machine of Delavan Kegg and the man suspected of being Steyer Meebe, they were out on the broad blue bay.

Peter settled comfortably in his seat and, when he considered himself safe from detection, watched his companion out of the corners of his eyes.

Suddenly he surprised her with the point-blank statement:

"You're a secret service agent, Miss Ethel Hubbard."

She turned her head and looked at him in blank amazement. "What on earth has caused you to reach that conclusion?" she queried.

"Counterfeit money," he returned enigmatically.

"Counterfeit money, Mr. Lavender! I don't know what you're talking about."

"No use, sister—you can't fool me. But don't worry. Your secret is safe. I have suspected that old pagan for some time of being up to some strange business up there in the hills. Better take me into your confidence. *I know something.*"

"You *know* something! What on earth are you driving at?"

"Remember that fiver that old Sockett slipped me as commission for renting his cottage to you? The one I put in my mascot frame, and which was later stolen?"

"Yes—certainly."

"It was phony," Peter amplified. "They had turned it down at the bank. I had it framed once, but had to take it out next

day, you see, because—er—now— Well, because I was broke and needed gasoline to show my three-hundred-dollar prospect —may heaven bless him—the ranch that he later bought. And when I offered it at the bank to get some change, they sat on it. Then, for sentimental reasons, I framed her anyway."

"But it was part of the hundred dollars that I gave Zeal Sockett," she reminded him.

"You thought it was; I thought it was. But don't you recall that, before giving me my slice, he slipped the whole works into a bill fold? Then, when I gave him the gentle 'Ahem!' he took out a five-spot and passed it to me?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"He hadn't forgotten my commission at all," explained Peter. "That was a stall to give him a chance to put the bills in his fold and palm out a counterfeit with which to pay me. Pretty clever, by golly! If it came back on him, he had only to remind me that he had got the money from you, and his skirts would be clear."

"But I saw him give you one of the identical bills that I gave him," Kate objected.

"You *thought* you did," he corrected her. "So did I at the time, but— Why, what's wrong, Miss Hubbard?"

Kate, with her face suddenly white as paper, was jerking open her hand-bag. She pulled out a roll of bills.

"This roll of bills," she said trembling, "represents every cent of money that I have in the world. I am positive that Sockett transferred one of them to you. Then —then suppose *all* of my money is counterfeit! The thought appals me."

"I can tell," Peter informed her gloomily. "The teller at the bank showed me what was wrong with that other one. Let's get out of the machine and go back aft where there's good sunlight. Then we'll look over your stake, bill at a time."

"It's all in fives," said Kate, as he helped her out in the gangway. "Two hundred and sixty-five dollars is all that I possess in this world. Oh, goodness! How you've worried me!"

Ten minutes later, as they stood together on the open portion of the after deck, Peter passed back to her the last of the bills that he had examined.

"Every one of them is wrong," he said. "Where in thunder did you get 'em?"

"From my father," she replied, her gray eyes tragic. "When he went to New York to begin a lecture course—he's a scientist and explorer, you know—he split with me —gave me half of all the money we have in the world. Oh, dear! What shall I do? And here I'm on my way to San Francisco without a penny to my name!"

"Then you're not a secret service agent trying to get the goods on Zeal Sockett for counterfeiting?"

"I should say not!" she flashed back. "I'm just trying to recover twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of — of property that a friend of Sockett's stole from my father. I have been spying on Sockett in order to locate this friend of his. He is now in the car ahead of ours."

"Oh! So that's it. And that big boob has twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of stuff that belongs to you?"

"Yes, and it could be converted into cash within two weeks' time," Kate moaned, and her voice showed that she was close to tears.

"There! There!" soothed Peter. "Don't cry, little girl. Everything is lovely, now that you've explained. That twenty-five thousand bucks is yours. Just tell me all about it, and I'll have the cash for you before the boat docks at San Francisco."

So there really was nothing to be done but for Kate to tell her story from beginning to end, and to confess that Miss Ethel Hubbard was a fictitious name.

"Why, sure your father's heads are hidden somewhere on Sockett's property!" exclaimed Peter as she concluded her long story. "Or else in this ark of Meebe's. And, by golly, you're a little wonder to have ferreted out as much as you have! I wish you had told me sooner, so that I could have helped you. But I'll help you from now on. We'll trail these birds to their nest, and maybe locate Meebe's hangout. Then we'll—we'll just put them out of business. I've got ten dollars on me. We can trail 'em quite a way on that."

"But what am *I* going to do for money?" wailed Kate.

"Well, I wouldn't worry about that now," he said. "Maybe we'll have your shrunken heads before nightfall, and you can ship 'em East to the fellow who wants them. I can arrange for the bank to hold you up until you get your money—that is, provided we get the heads. We've just got to get 'em—that's all—and get 'em quick! Leave everything to me, Miss Hub—er—Kate. I like Kate much better than Ethel, by the way."

"But how do you expect to get them when we don't know where they are?"

"Right now I haven't the slightest idea," Peter confessed. "But we'll get 'em—never fear, young lady!"

The ferry boat was nearing the San Francisco side, and they returned to the automobile and climbed in. At last the boat was in her slip, and ahead of them the string of cars was on the move. Close behind the big car they were following, they went through the ferry building and out in the Embarcadero. The chase led them along the waterfront toward the automobile ferry for Oakland.

Once more, without the occupants of the pursued machine knowing that they were followed, Kate and Peter ran in behind them on an Oakland ferry boat. In less than half an hour they were ashore on the other side and following the big car in a northerly direction.

Then they approached the waterfront again, and finally the big car stopped.

Peter had just time to draw to the curb and halt his own machine. There was a bakery right abreast of them.

"Get out and look at the stuff in the window," Peter commanded. "I'm your husband, and you're shopping. I'll watch their movements."

Kate obeyed at once, crossed the sidewalk, and stood looking at the pans of doughnuts and buns in the bakery window, her back to whatever might be developing in the little drama of which she was a part.

"All right," called Peter presently. "The ten-cent guy got out and the dollar-and-a-half wompus drove away in the car. Best to watch the little fellow, I thought. He's gone out of sight down over the sea wall. Get in again. I'm going to follow him on foot."

He trotted away across the street as Kate took her seat. For a little she saw him, then he went down a set of steps to the level of the water. Presently he appeared again and came running back.

"Come on!" he commanded when close to her. "He's in a launch and is heading out on the bay. I've hired another launch to take us and follow him—as far as our money lasts. Two-fifty an hour, by golly! Can't go to the South Seas on what we've got! Our car'll be all right here, I guess. Take a chance, anyway."

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE FOREPEAK.

A BRONZED Swede fisherman with rope-colored hair and sky-blue eyes was the owner of the launch that Pete had hired so precipitately. He was a reserved sort of person, and attended to his own business at the wheel while Kate and her red-headed companion sat in the cockpit and talked. Some distance ahead of them Peter pointed out the craft that the recent occupant of the trailed car had boarded. There seemed to be nobody else in the boat.

"I told our skipper to just keep that boat in sight," Peter confided to Kate. "We don't want to rush him, or capture him, or anything like that. We simply want to trail him to his home port.

"This makes a unique mystery that your search for your father's curios has unearthed," he continued. "It's what they call intriguing these days—a one-eyed seafaring man who looks like an ape, one time boatswain of a ship that carried tropical animals and lost them because of cold weather, the mysterious code, the counterfeit money, the rum running—and all that. I can't see, though, that this second plot which you have brought to light has anything to do with the disappearance of your father's heads—except that it proves the men you have to deal with to be thorough rascals. That wash-up elephant interests

me. There's deep mystery about that. Evidently Sockett sawed off his ivories and saved them. And what about the soldier who was slammed in prison on Alcatraz Island? Where does he fit in?"

"He may have nothing at all to do with the matter," Kate observed. "Sockett might have been acquainted with him and saved the clipping on that account. The postscript to his letter to Kegg mentioned a man named Yates as being in prison. But this imprisoned soldier whom I read about in the newspaper clipping was called Pleasant."

Peter dropped into deep thought after this, and Kate followed his example. They watched the boat ahead of them, wondering if the steersman had any idea that he was being followed. This seemed improbable, however, as there were many small power-boats on the bay.

"He seems to be heading straight for Alcatraz Island," Peter presently remarked.

"You're still trying to connect the imprisoned soldier with the unfortunate elephant, aren't you?"

"Maybe I am. But if that is so, I'm not meeting with any noticeable success."

The leading launch passed the grim old island and kept on toward Raccoon Strait. She entered the strait when the mouth opened to her, and quartered across toward the Marin County shore.

A trim little yacht lay just ahead of her now, and it soon became evident that this was her goal. Presently, she ran alongside a lowered gangway and stopped. The watchers saw a man descending the gangway. He stood on the grating, just above the water, and seemed to be talking with the fellow in the launch.

"Dere he bane," complacently observed the Scandinavian. "Vot skoll ve do now?"

"Run past the yacht," ordered Peter Lavender. "Don't pay any particular attention to her or the launch. Keep on toward the Marin shore after you've passed."

But before they came abreast the gangway the launch had shoved off again, and the man who had come down had ascended and passed out of sight into the neat cabin.

Peter now told the Swede to head a little to port and make for the shore. This, he trusted, would throw off suspicion, while their changed course would not prevent them from watching the quarry for some time to come. As they passed the yacht, Kate looked back curiously. She gave a little gasp of comprehension.

"Look!" she said in a low voice. "See the yacht's name there?"

And on her counter Peter read, "Walrus."

"Uh-huh—the booze runner," he remarked. "Well, we're getting along."

Then suddenly, as they looked interestedly astern at the yacht, they saw a series of flags dart up on a halyard to the forepeak. In all, there were thirteen flags in the string, and soon they were whipping out straight astern in the breeze.

"Goodness! Look at that!" cried Kate. "The code! At the top is the figure 5. Written on paper, it would read 'A handful.' And it is on the same key of the typewriter with the letter T. The next under it is the figure 9—or 'Six gone wrong'—which represents the letter O. The next flag bears the semicolon, called 'The sheik's saber,' representing the letter M. Another 9. Two bearing the figure 4. The 9 again. The figure 2."

Peter had snatched out his notebook and was scribbling as she announced the names of the characters on the flags.

"Next is a plain white flag," she continued. "That separates the words, I guess. Now comes a colon, the figure 9 twice, and the colon again. That's all."

She took the notebook from his hand, her fingers trembling. "I can read it easily as it would be written," she said. "Listen. It probably would read something like this:

"A handful for six gone wrong and the shiek's saber gives Jo twice six gone wrong less twice that. Space. Buckshot and six gone wrong on buckshot."

"M'm'm!" marveled Peter. "And that means?"

Kate was translating the characters into the letters, T-o-m-o-r-r-o-w n-o-o-n.

"Well, that settles that," he laughed. "Will we be here to-morrow noon? The answer is, we will!"

"But who is the signal intended for?"

was the girl's puzzled question. "Maybe your Swedish friend has a pair of glasses. Get them and look over the bay."

Being directed by the boat owner, Peter found a pair of binoculars in the cabin and hastened aft with them. As he scoured the bay on all sides with them he said:

"I think I've got it, but I can't be sure, of course. Is it a wild supposition to suggest that the signal may be for the prisoner on Alcatraz Island? We don't even know that he had anything at all to do with the plot, you know."

"I was thinking the same thing," Kate returned. "Del Kegg and the man Meebe—if it is he who is in the other launch—make an automobile trip to San Marino and hold a conference with Zeal Sockett, a third member of the gang. They return to Oakland by way of San Francisco, and Meebe takes a boat for the Walrus, which we know is concerned in whatever is afoot. He tells somebody aboard the Walrus—Zeb, we'll call him, since that name was signed in cipher to the telegram—he tells Zeb the outcome of the conference in Sockett's cabin. Then Zeb signals *somebody* that tomorrow noon is the time that has been decided upon for whatever mysterious business is to take place. Now who received the signal?"

"I can't discover an answering signal anywhere," Peter told her. "I've had the glasses trained on every boat in sight, and on several arks over close to the Marin County shore. Nothing doing."

"Try Alcatraz Island," she advised.

"I have. I've got her now. Can't see anything waving, or flags, or anything in the nature of a reply."

"The signal is still up aboard the yacht," Kate informed him. "If it had been answered, they would lower their string of flags, wouldn't they? Keep on watching. Maybe the person for whom the signal is intended hasn't seen it yet. I'll watch the launch."

The task that the girl had assigned herself was easier than Peter's, for the powerboat of the suspected man churned on toward the Marin shore and a cluster of arks, or house-boats, that fringed it. Presently, though it was now some distance from her, she saw it glide in beside one of the arks and come to rest.

"We've located Meebe's lair, at any rate," she announced. "It's the second ark over there—the white one with green trimmings."

"Is the signal still up aboard the yacht?" asked her companion.

"Yes."

"Then we've still got a chance. I'm concentrating on Alcatraz Island. I've got a hunch that, if an answer comes at all, it will show up over there."

"If this man is a prisoner," Kate mused, "he won't have much of a chance to signal. He—"

"There she is!" Pete interrupted excitedly. "A big piece of white paper fell from one of the windows of the prison. Watch the yacht. If they lower the string of flags, I'm right in supposing that falling paper is a signal. But if—"

"Down she comes!" cried Kate with equal animation. "The dropping paper was the reply to the signal, and they're hauling down the string of flags."

"Then that settles another point," Pete sighed with satisfaction as he lowered the glasses. "Now what's a soldier imprisoned on Alcatraz got to do with a rum-running yacht, a floating elephant, and your father's shrunken heads?"

"We'll perhaps find out the answer tomorrow, if we're here again," she replied.

Peter Valentine Lavender lifted his voice to the tow-head at the wheel.

"Shoot us back, brother. We yearn for the smell of earth again." And to Kate: "We'll make arrangements for him to bring us out again before noon to-morrow. I'll hit up the bank for a little piece of money. Don't worry; we're getting close to home. And say—don't let me forget my hat."

CHAPTER XIII.

CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST.

IT was an hour after dark before Kate and Peter drove into San Marino. As they passed the bank, Peter saw a moving figure in the lighted interior, and swung his noisy little car to the curb.

" There's somebody in the bank," he told Kate. " It's probably the cashier, Saler. He's a pretty good friend of mine. The bank won't open again until ten to-morrow morning, and that'll be too late to hit him up for a little cash. We must be on our way to the bay before that hour. I'll just step to the window and make a noise like an important depositor, and maybe he'll let me in and listen to my sad tale."

He got out and crossed the sidewalk. He grasped the handle of the locked door and rattled it. Kate saw a shadow moving toward the door, and presently it was opened and a man confronted Peter.

" Well, for heaven's sake!" she heard him ejaculate. " Just the Ezekiel I wanted to see! Come in, Peterkins—I want to have a word with you about a little matter that's just come up."

Pete looked back at Kate, knowing that she must have heard. He gave her a wink, which was half apology for leaving her and half triumph over his unexpected luck. Then he went in and the door was locked again.

Kate waited for about five minutes in the car, then the bank door was opened once more and Peter hurried out to her. Saler, the cashier continued to stand in the doorway, and kept his eyes on them.

" Listen," Peter began excitedly. " There are some government dicks in there. They're investigating the counterfeit five-dollar bills that have been showing up in San Marino lately. Now, don't get scared—everything's all right. They asked me where I got the one that I flashed the other day, and I had to give 'em all of the particulars. Now they want to question you. Come on in, won't you? Nothing at all to be scared of. I'll take care of you."

" But—"

" Come on. Best thing in the world for us. I've got another new scheme now. Two of 'em, in fact. The first is that, while you're talking with these government agents, I'll have a fine chance to bone Saler for twenty bucks. I'll tell him we're on the eve of making our fortune—which I firmly believe to be a fact—and— Oh, come on in and have it out with them. They'll be nice as pie to you."

So she permitted him to help her out and lead her to the open door and the man who stood waiting.

" Miss—er—Cuyler," began Peter grandiloquently, " permit me the pleasure of introducing my friend, Mr. Saler. Miss Cuyler is ready and willing to give you all of the information that she has, Mr. Saler. Kindly step in, Miss Cuyler."

Inside, Saler relocked the doors and led the way through the gloomy main room of the bank to the door of his private office, through the ground glass of which a weird light streamed. Masculine voices and cigar smoke greeted Kate as this door was opened. Three large, well dressed men looked at her piercingly as she entered. Behind Saler, the hatless real estate man sneaked in, determined to have a finger in the pie.

Saler accomplished the introductions. Armsby, Baker, and Stissing were the names of the trio of government agents. The perturbed girl was seated by the cashier. Then the big fellow called Stissing leaned his fat elbows on the glass-topped desk and, leveling his cold gray eyes at her, began the inquisition.

But before she had answered many questions Peter Valentine Lavender leaned over her.

" Miss Cuyler, and gentlemen," he said, " if you'll permit me to intrude, I'd like to suggest that Miss Cuyler tell the entire story that she told me to-day in regard to this matter. I'm sure you fellows will be interested, and I think you'll get more information in that way than by questioning her."

" All right," said Stissing. " Go ahead, Miss Cuyler."

Kate looked up pleadingly at Peter and shook her head.

" Go on," he whispered. " Best thing in the world for us. We'll rope these fellows in for to-morrow noon. They'll do all the work, and while they're trying to arrest somebody for the counterfeiting, they'll—you know—find out where our heads are hidden. That's my second scheme. Shoot the piece, Kate."

So Kate began with her father's meeting with Delevan Kegg aboard the Hyperion, and told her story up to and including the

events of the day. And the three secret service men listened without a word of comment to the end.

When she finished they looked at one another shrewdly. Armsby was the first to break the silence.

"You, Miss Cuyler," he said, "are all right. And I want to assure you now that none of us has the slightest suspicion of you. You've done a remarkable piece of work. We can take up the case from where you left off and make a neat little clean-up to-morrow. Just a little tracing to-night in San Francisco and we'll know all about this fellow on Alcatraz Island. And when we do we'll be able to fit him into the puzzle. And you say that you haven't the slightest idea how you came to possess these phony five-spots?"

"Not the slightest in the world," she replied, laying on the table her roll of spurious bills.

"Well, we have," put in the third detective, Baker, as he examined the money. "This Delevan Kegg, under several different names, is well known to us. He's an old-time counterfeiter. That's why he was in Mexico, perhaps—though what you have told us hints at some other trouble he got into here in the United States. If it were worth while I'd suggest that you send a wire to your father in New York, asking if Kegg didn't make change for him when they were on shipboard.

"I'll bet the answer would be 'Yes.' But we haven't time for that, and it doesn't matter, anyway. What we want to find out now is the secret hang-out of this gang; and when we find that we'll get the dope on the counterfeiting business and your father's curios as well. Also we'll get a couple of whisky dicks and clean up the whole shooting match at one fell swoop! I suggest that you let Mr. Lavender take you home now, and that you meet us here at the bank at eight to-morrow morning. Or, better still, can't you bring her to the city in your car, Lavender? That would save time. Can you get her there by nine?"

"You bet I can," Peter replied earnestly. "That is, if— Step here a moment, Saler, old dear."

And Peter came back from the secret conference with a wide grin on his face and five red-hot ten-dollar bills in his pocket, three of which he made Kate accept when they were in the car again.

"Funny thing," he remarked as they coughed away. "What started this investigation was the reappearance at the bank of my mascot five-spot—the one I got from Sockett as commission for renting his cottage to you. The bank took its number, of course, though I told them I wouldn't put it in circulation. I bounced out, mad, when the teller told me it wasn't all right. Later the bank tried to get the bill, saying it was their duty to remove it from circulation, and all that. But I showed it to Saler, all framed, and told my little tale about—well, my little sentiment, you know—and he let me keep it.

"It was stolen afterward, frame and all, you remember, and my faith in humanity was shaken. But to-day it turned up at the bank again. Green, the groceryman, was the victim this time. And the funny thing is that, just by chance, he knew where he got the bill. And the fellow that gave it to him in payment for groceries is undoubtedly the bird that stole it out of my office."

"Who passed it to him?" Kate asked.

"Zeal Sockett," Peter replied. "Talk about chickens coming home to roost! But say—I forgot! We've got fifty dollars between us. Some loot! Let's find a pie foundry and eat!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CURATOR'S STORY.

SHORTLY after nine o'clock the following morning Kate Cuyler, wearing the oriole's feathers again, was with Peter Valentine Lavender in the Ferry Building in San Francisco. They had not long to wait, for soon the government operative called Armsby came up to them and asked them to go with him.

The three left the Ferry Building, and Armsby ushered the new arrivals into a taxicab. They were whirled away through the city, to be deposited finally at Fishermen's Wharf, in the Italian district. Armsby

now led Kate and Peter down a gangway to a float, alongside which lay a speedy-looking power boat. In her cockpit, besides a seamanly looking person who was tinkering with the engine, were four men. Two of them were Armsby's fellow workers whom Kate had met in the bank. The other two, she learned when they were introduced to her, were Federal enforcement agents.

"All right, old-timer," said the man named Stissing to the commander of the little craft.

The man started the engine, cast off his lines, threw in the clutch. The speedy boat leaped forward, dodged through the neck of the inlet, and headed for the center of the bay, the white foam boiling from her cutwater.

Armsby seated himself beside Kate. "We don't anticipate any trouble," he assured her. "If anything rough starts, you duck into the cabin and keep out of sight. We were undecided whether or not it was advisable to bring you along, Miss Cuyler, but in the end we reached the conclusion that you might prove invaluable to us. You seem to be able to read that secret code of these crooks pretty rapidly, and it may happen that we'll need a rapid reading. So we took the risk."

"Don't mind me," said Kate. "I've taken risks before. But will you tell me just what we're going to do?"

"That all depends on what turns up," he replied. "But I'll tell you something of what we've already done. Early this morning I was at the military post where this fellow, Tom Pleasant, mentioned in the newspaper clipping you told us about, was tried and sentenced to imprisonment on Alcatraz Island for assault with a deadly weapon. I routed out the commanding officer and we went together to post headquarters, where we dug into the records.

"We discovered that this fellow Tom Pleasant had given his occupation as seaman when he enlisted in the army. This gave me a fine clew, for I wanted to find out that Tom Pleasant and the man called Yates, whom Sockett mentioned in his letter to Kegg as being in prison, were one and the same. So I called up my associates, and we made speed to the shipping offices.

"With three of us working, it didn't take long to trace the name Yates. We found that on a certain date a man named Asher Yates had shipped as a deck hand on the steamer Vigilance, Dan Crary, master, for a trip to the Orient. Further investigation brought to light the fact that, after the Vigilance had docked in San Francisco on her return voyage, Asher Yates had disappeared without receiving a formal discharge.

"The Vigilance, we also learned, had picked up in Asiatic ports several shipments of animals, which had been collected by a man named Delavan Kegg, who had been commissioned to buy them for the San Francisco Zoo. The greater portion of these animals perished *en route* here, which bears out Sockett's words to you.

"Next I got the manager of the zoo on the telephone, and he verified the facts, stating that, since the date of the arrival of the steamer, Delavan Kegg had not been heard from. He had not even shown up at the zoo to report the loss of the greater part of his shipment of animals. All trace of him had been lost.

"I was on the point of hanging up when the manager of the zoo told me that the curator of the Milton Memorial Museum, who is a friend of his, might have something to tell me about that trip of the Vigilance which would interest me. He gave me his number, and I called him up.

"'Be sure,' he said, 'I remember all about it. Those valuable animals weren't the only thing that was lost on that memorable voyage. Mr. Andrew G. Wayne, the noted collector of Oriental relics was among the passengers. He was bringing to the States a collection of Indian, Chinese, and Persian rugs which he had spent ten years getting together. He had scoured all over Asia for them, and he considered the lot one of the finest in existence.

"'The collection was to have been placed on exhibition in the Memorial Museum here for a few weeks before being shipped to New York, where it was to be sold for something like two hundred thousand dollars. That's how I come to know about it. But I never set eyes on those priceless relics. They were missing from the Vigilance's hold

when she docked. An insurance company is now being sued for the loss. This man Kegg, whom you mention, obviously was suspected. Mr. Wayne employed a detective agency in San Francisco to locate him. The detective who had the case in hand died recently, I understand, without unearthing the whereabouts of Kegg. And there the matter stands—except that the insurance company in which the rugs were insured for their full value—two hundred thousand, I'm almost positive—has offered ten thousand dollars' reward for the recovery of the collection.'"

Armsby looked cunningly at Kate, who had been listening silently, with her red lips parted. "How does that sound to you, Miss Cuyler?" he asked.

"I—I hardly know," she faltered.

"I don't want to raise false hopes," the government operative continued, "but it strikes me that we are to-day on the trail of those valuable antique rugs. If we find them, of course, the ten thousand goes to you. But don't get excited. We may be all wrong in our conclusions. But I'd be willing to lay a little bet that those rugs aren't many miles from us this moment."

"But how could Mr. Kegg get them out of the hold of the ship and smuggle them ashore?" asked Kate.

"That's the mystery of the whole thing," Armsby replied. "They were discovered to be missing before the steamer reached port. In other words, they were lost at sea—the discovery being made when the Vigilance was about a hundred miles from San Francisco.

"This point gives the insurance company their grounds on which to fight the case. They claim fraud—that the rugs were worthless and had been thrown overboard en route by the owner with the idea of defrauding the company. If the rugs are recovered and are found to be as valuable as claimed, I understand, the insurance company has agreed to stand the expense of recovering them—namely, the ten thousand reward. They'd be getting off cheap, at that, for it strikes me that they'd have a hard time proving fraud; and if they can't prove fraud they'll have to pungle up two hundred thousand dollars."

"And do you consider that, if the rugs are recovered to-day, I will be entitled to the reward?"

"Beyond a doubt, Miss Cuyler. My associates and I are government agents, engaged in running down counterfeiters. Rewards are not for us."

"Why, that would be five thousand dollars apiece, wouldn't it?" mused Kate.

"I don't understand," said Armsby.

"Mr. Lavender is entitled to half of it," Kate explained simply. "If it hadn't been for him and his little car, and his mascot five-dollar bill, I wouldn't be here with you this morning, with the possibility ahead of clearing up this mystery."

"Well, that's up to you, of course. But don't think about it too much. You may be disappointed. You'll be lucky if you find your father's curios in this suspected cache. The rugs may have been disposed of some time ago—the heads, too, for that matter. But they're both risky commodities to peddle. We stand a chance."

"And just what do you think is liable to happen at noon to-day?" she asked.

"That's a difficult question to answer," he told her. "To be perfectly frank with you, we haven't the ghost of an idea. We're just going to be on hand in a speedy power boat and find out. The Walrus, we have learned, is pretty fast. So we think we're fully prepared for anything that may turn up."

They fell silent. The power boat had raced past the wharves of San Francisco, turned, and was now speeding toward the Marin County shore. Her nose stood up out of the water and two sheets of white boiled astern and made a wide V as they churned from her bow. She came abreast the yacht club at Sausalito, darted up Richardson Bay, then headed back toward deeper water. On the decks of the ferryboats many passengers stood and watched her as she hastened on, her powerful motor humming until it could be heard for miles.

"Have a hard time leaving us behind," remarked Armsby. "But they say that booze runner can travel too. We may see a pretty chase to-day."

He consulted his watch, then stepped forward and talked with his fellow operatives.

Then Armsby said something to the man at the wheel. He nodded and kept his course, but turned presently, slowed down, and approached Alcatraz Island at a moderate rate of speed.

Then it was that Kate saw a craft which she knew at a glance to be the Walrus gliding slowly toward the island on the other side.

She looked at her wrist watch.

It was fourteen minutes to noon.

"Look!" said Armsby, stepping aft to her and handing her a pair of strong glasses. "Here comes the Walrus. Be ready to translate any code signal that she may run up."

He took out a notebook and a gold pencil and seated himself at her side.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHASE.

AN air of expectancy settled over the occupants of the speed boat as the Walrus, still moving slowly through the water, neared Alcatraz Island on the other side. Armsby sat with his pencil poised over his notebook, and Kate watched the yacht through her glasses. But in over five minutes no signal was run up to the forepeak of the suspected vessel.

Armsby spoke to the helmsman.

"He's going around on the other side of the island," was his warning. "Change course and run around our end."

The boat instantly changed her course. Half a minute more passed, and still no signal. Then the Walrus went out of sight as she rounded the northern end of Alcatraz.

"All right! Speed up a little," commanded Armsby. "But slow down again when you sight her on the other side."

The engine of the speed boat began to roar. On either side of her nose a hoary mustache came into being. In almost no time, it seemed, she had leaped to the western side of Alcatraz, and the Walrus was in sight once more.

Then the eager watchers noticed something which had previously escaped their vision. It was a small launch which was running abreast the yacht, and which theretofore had been unseen because of the yacht's protecting bulk between them.

And now the Walrus had slowed down until she was barely creeping along, while the smaller boat went ahead, close in to the island.

Armsby glanced at his watch.

"Exactly noon," he reported.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when from the island there came a long-drawn shout. Next instant a figure went tumbling down the steep, rocky cliff that rose from the water's edge. There was a flash of orange, a puff of smoke, and a military rifle barked snappishly. Kate caught one brief glance of a man in khaki kneeling and training a rifle on the rolling object; and then she knew that it was a man who went recklessly down that slope, and that the sentry was firing at him point-blank.

A splash. The figure struck the water, went under. And then came the launch which had been running beside the Walrus.

Instantly, now, Kate recognized it as the craft that she and Peter Valentine Lavender had followed the day before.

"M-m!" muttered Armsby grimly. "A jail delivery, eh? I half expected it."

The rifle spoke again and again. Up on the island soldiers were running.

"Corp'r'l o' th' guard!" came the cry. "Post nombah two! Prisoner escapin'!"

A bobbing head appeared in the water, close to the speeding launch. Several rifles barked, but hands reached down and dragged the man over the side. And with bullets whistling after it, the launch turned and ran for the open sea.

"The yacht! Look at the yacht!" cried one of the operatives.

The Walrus had closed in behind the launch and was following her, protecting her with her greater bulk against the shower of bullets from the island.

An officer appeared suddenly up on the rocks above the watchers. In his hand was a megaphone.

"Launch ahoy!" came booming over the water. "I commandeer that launch in the name of the United States government! Run around to the boat landing at once! I need you!"

"Suits us," muttered Armsby. "Shoot around there, Henry."

There were a number of armed soldiers waiting when the speed boat made her landing at the wharf. There were several officers, too, among them, the major in command. He started in to make explanations, but was cut short by Armsby, who told him that he knew all about it and asked him to hurry and get his men aboard.

They clambered over the side at the commanding officer's order. A captain and a lieutenant accompanied them.

"Follow that yacht and launch!" commanded the captain. "A prisoner has escaped, and—"

"Sit down, captain," said Armsby quietly. "We know more about it, perhaps, than you do. Here—look over this. Then I'll explain more fully."

He handed him an open billfold in which, Kate supposed, were papers which identified him as a Federal officer.

"Don't worry, captain," Armsby soothed him. "You're in the fastest little boat on the bay, and we'll be right at their heels when we round the island again. Step on it, Henry!"

Then the speed boat leaped back in sight of the yacht, and the chase began.

"Chances are they've transferred the escaped prisoner from the launch to the Walrus," said Armsby to the captain. "Yes, there is the launch now, making off to the north. But suppose they haven't? Suppose we follow the yacht and overhaul her, only to discover that we've been fooled and that your prisoner has made his get-away in the launch? What's the use of the two boats, anyway, if not to deceive pursuers if any one happened to take up the chase?"

"I believe you're right, Mr. Armsby," the captain agreed. "I think it would be the wiser plan to run down the launch first and investigate her. Then if your speed boat is as fast as you think she is, we can overtake the Walrus later. But she's swift, too; I've watched her here in the bay for the past several days."

"We'll have to take a chance on that," Armsby told him, and then directed the steersman to change course and run down the launch.

Toward Raccoon Strait the launch was running at what must have been her utmost speed. The swift craft swung in astern of her; and then the powerful engine began to roar, and soon she was dashing along at terrific speed, her nose entirely out of water, the spray dashing aft and drenching those in her cockpit. In less than five minutes she was close upon the launch, and they were able to see the faces of two men as they glared astern at them.

"We've got her easily," remarked the captain. "But, confound it, look at that yacht! She's almost out of the Golden Gate right now!"

Then he stood up and hurled a command forward at the occupants of the other cockpit.

"Stop that engine, there, you!" he bawled. "Stop it instantly, or I'll riddle you with lead!"

At once the launch began slowing down, and presently the speed boat ran alongside her and boat hooks grabbed her gunwales.

"Arrest those men for aiding in the escape of a government prisoner!" commanded the captain harshly.

And the two men quite submissively allowed soldiers to clamber into their cockpit and take possession of them and their launch. Kate never before had seen either of them.

The boat was hastily searched. The escaped prisoner was not aboard of her, according to a sergeant's report to the captain.

"Stung, eh!" grumbled the officer. "Well, we just had to take a chance. Sergeant Henning, take five men with you in the launch and make these two fellows run her to Alcatraz. Present my compliments to the commanding officer, and ask him to put these men under guard until I return. Tell him I have gone with Federal officers to run down the Walrus, aboard of which is the escaped prisoner. That's all. Make it snappy!"

A minute more and the power boat was on her way toward the Golden Gate, cutting madly through the choppy waters in her interrupted chase of the Walrus, which was by now completely lost to view.

"Can she get away from us?" asked the captain.

"We'll see," Armsby answered grimly.

In a remarkably short space of time the speed boat was battling with the angry waters of the Golden Gate. She rolled and pitched frantically, but it seemed that her rapid progress was by no means diminished. Kate Cuyler, however, was pale and faint from seasickness again, and her misery lasted until the boat had left the heads and was in the smoother waters of the open sea.

The army officers and Armsby were eagerly training glasses here and there as the boat bore away from the frowning cliffs on either side.

"There she is!" came the excited exclamation from the young lieutenant.

And then the chase began in earnest.

It was apparent to all, after half an hour's run, that the speedboat was gradually overtaking the larger craft. But the yacht herself was so fast that the distance between them lessened slowly.

"Take two hours to run her down," was the opinion of the man at the wheel. "But we'll overhaul her in time."

The yacht hastened away to the south, the speedboat following her slightest change of course. It proved a long, hard chase, but in the middle of the afternoon the pursuer was within hailing distance. It was the army captain who stood up in the cockpit of the speedboat and, with a megaphone to his lips, ordered the Walrus to stop her engines and permit him to come alongside. But no reply was made to the command. Neither did the yacht's speed slacken.

"Well," remarked the captain, "we'll just have to run her down, and when we come abreast of her show them the holes in our pieces."

Ten minutes of anxiety followed, then the speedboat was slowly creeping abreast of the yacht.

"Detachment, attention!" came the captain's sharp command. "Kneel!"

The soldiers knelt, facing the yacht.

"Detachment, load!"

The mechanism of the rifles clicked.

Kate's heart was in her mouth. Her brain was a whirl with excitement. She felt a warm hand creep about hers and looked up into the blue eyes of the red-headed real estate man.

"Not bad!" remarked Peter dryly. "Sorta breaks the monotony of life, eh?"

He smiled broadly at her, and she let her fingers remain passive in his hand. Somehow or other it gave her a world of confidence.

"Ready!" the captain's voice clicked above the terrific roaring of the engine. "At the enemy! Aim!"

The barrels of the soldiers' pieces gleamed in the sunlight as they were thrust out over the gunwale of the speedboat.

"Corporal Hicks," shouted the captain, "you're an expert rifleman. See if you can pick off the man at the wheel in the pilot house there."

"Yes, sir!"

"Steady, men!" A running figure had come in sight aboard the yacht. "As you were!" The rifles came back to the "ready" again, and a man was leaning over the rail of the yacht amidships and waving a white flag.

Immediately the yacht slowed down, the speedboat ran alongside, and the army captain shouted up:

"Lower your gangway! We're coming aboard!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WATER-TIGHT CONTAINER.

THE boarding detachment of soldiers met with no resistance as they clambered up the lowered gangway to the deck of the Walrus.

The captain bustled about, detailing men here and there to keep the crew under guard during the run back to San Francisco Bay. Zeal Sockett, who was aboard, the man called Meebe, the recaptured prisoner, and a big fellow who limped—none other than Del Kegg — were marched into the yacht's cabin. When order had been restored Armsby appeared at the rail and called down to Kate and Peter.

"You'll both be interested," he said, "in our questioning of the main prisoners. Will you come up?"

So Peter helped Kate up the steps of the gangway for the run back to the city. The gangway was immediately hoisted at the

lieutenant's command. Then the yacht went about and started the trip back to her former anchorage.

It was Armsby who, in the snug little mahogany cabin of the Walrus, went at the prisoners. And it was Del Kegg who first saw the uselessness of stubbornness and revealed what the captors wanted to know.

"Yes, Miss Cuyler," he said, with an attempt at a pleasant smile, "I'm the bird that got away with your father's shrunken heads. How you landed us finally I don't know, and don't know that it matters, either. I guess the game's up this time, and we'll get off easier if we come across. Your father's heads are in a little cabin owned by my friend Zeal Sockett, here. There's a natural cave under his cabin, and he gets at it through the floor, the trapdoor being covered by a heavy sea chest. That is, the chest is nailed to the floor, but the bottom of it comes out, and that makes the door to the cave. You'll find this cabin—"

"Aw, she knows all about it," Sockett interrupted growlingly, as he pulled out his little silver phial and began loading his horn-shaped pipe. "That's the Lizzie I rented the cottage to, Del. She's been spyin' on me for a couple o' weeks. *Maskee!*"

"Yes, it doesn't matter much now," said Kate, with a smile.

Sockett's fierce one eye blazed at her; then he nodded his gorillalike head sagely. "You been around," he said. "I savvy."

"Go ahead, Mr. Kegg," said Armsby sternly. "You might as well get it off your chest. Is the booze the Walrus has been bringing in stored there, too?"

"Yep," Del Kegg replied indifferently. "Good stuff—lots of it."

"And where is the collection of valuable Oriental rugs that was stolen from Andrew G. Wayne?" the government operative shot at him unexpectedly.

Kegg sat up straight, and his heavy jaw sagged down. Sockett, too, poured rum all over his horny hand as he stared at Armsby.

Then Kegg, bound to make the best of it, looked at the prisoner who, for a brief few hours, had breathed the air of freedom from the military prison.

"That's what we'd all like to know," he replied. "That is, all of us but this bird here."

"Suppose you make a clean breast of everything," suggested Armsby.

Kegg continued to look at the military prisoner, a sullen-faced man who sat with his fingers clasped before him and gazed at the deck.

"How 'bout it, Ash?" he asked.

"Go ahead," said the man without looking up. "Shoot the piece!" Complete discouragement seemed to have claimed him.

"Well," said Kegg, "it was on that memorable trip from the Orient, when the Vigilance was loaded down with animals that I'd bought for the Frisco zoo, that it happened. The animals was dyin' right and left and—"

"Yes, we know all about that," the secret service man interrupted him. "Get down to a brief statement about Mr. Wayne's rugs."

"All right," said Kegg. "I'll make it snappy.

"I met this Mr. Wayne aboard the ship, and made up to him. He foolishly told me about his rugs. They were in the hold in a big water-tight tin container. We all got drunk—Sockett, here, who was the boson, and Asher Yates, a deck hand, Sockett's friend, and Meebe, here, another deck hand. The whole ship's crew were drunk, for that matter. That's how we got away with it. This fellow is Asher Yates, but he enlisted afterward in the army under the name of Tom Pleasant to hide out from the detectives who were after us for the rugs."

"You four stole them, then?"

"Sure we stole them."

"That stunt seems to be one of the best things you do, Kegg."

"It's just my misfortune to meet birds like that on shipboard," said Kegg in an aggrieved tone.

"But how did you manage to steal them at sea? The rugs were discovered missing a hundred miles out of San Francisco."

"We got that tin container out of the hold while the captain and the mates were stiff with liquor, and lashed it to the leg

of the last elephant that died. Then we heaved the elephant over the side. We knew that, if the bull sank, he'd come up again. The rugs would go down with him, of course, but they were lashed tight and would help to bring him up, if anything. And we figured that it would be an easier matter to find a floating bull that weighed over three tons than a small tin box of Oriental rugs. As soon as the Vigilance had anchored in San Francisco Bay we were gonta get a fast boat and go out huntin' for the elephant."

"And did you?"

"We did—Sockett and Meebe and me. But Yates had disappeared in the meantime."

"You found the elephant?"

"Yes—floatin' about in the vicinity of the Farallon Islands."

"And the rugs?"

"Missin'. Somebody had beat us to it. We figured it couldn't be anybody but Yates. So we went back to the city and started a hunt for 'im, but the dicks got so hot on my trail that I had to beat it for Mexico. Sockett ducked his nut over to Marin County, where he bought a piece of property in the woods that he knew about. He'd got ashore with a lot of booze he'd bought in China, and had enough to make his first payment on the property. Thought it would be a good place to hide while he hunted for Yates. He built the cabin over the cave on that piece of land when he and Meebe finally got into the booze game with the owner of this yacht, Zeb Taylor.

"Well, things rocked along, with me hidin' out in Mexico, and Meebe and Sockett keepin' low about Frisco and watchin' out for Yates.

"Then finally Sockett got a letter from Yates. He told about beatin' us to the floatin' elephant and gettin' the rugs and hidin' 'em somewhere along the coast. Then, scared of us and the dicks, too, he'd enlisted in the army under the name of Tom Pleasant. But he'd got into trouble and was sent up for a stretch at Alcatraz. He'd sneaked the letter out by a prisoner who was just bein' released. And he offered to take us to the hidden rugs, and claim no share in the profits from them, if we'd get him out of prison.

"Sockett and Zeb Taylor, the yacht owner, and Meebe had a code they used in the booze game. It was—"

"We know about that, too," Armsby once more stopped him.

"Well, I guess you know about all of it, then," was Kegg's chagrined retort. "Anyway, this soldier who had come out of prison agreed to sneak a letter back to Yates, for a certain consideration. He said he could get a pass any time to visit his old buddies in the barracks over there. So Sockett and Meebe wrote out the code and explained it, and this soldier sneaked the paper in to Yates.

"That was some time ago. Then they sent for me—Sockett and Meebe did. We told Zeb the particulars and offered him a whack at the loot if he'd donate the Walrus to the cause of gettin' Yates off the island. He did—and here we are. But I don't see how you—" He paused and looked keenly into the government agent's face. "You look familiar to me," he said.

"I ought to. I've been on your trail often enough. My name's Armsby."

Kegg lost his composure at last. His face whitened.

"Same old game, Kegg," said Armsby. "Passing out the queer. Didn't you slip Miss Cuyler's father a bunch of phony fives for larger bills when you were *en route* to San Francisco on the Hyperion?"

Kegg sighed wearily. "I guess maybe you're right," he answered. "I forgot about that."

Armsby wheeled on the man who had escaped from the disciplinary barracks.

"Where are those rugs hidden?" he barked. "Come across, now! You're about good for the rest of your life, anyway. Cough up everything."

"They're buried in the sand at Fullmoon Bay," came the sullen reply. "There's a big rock there—you can't miss it. A hundred yards straight east from that rock. Dig and you'll find 'em."

The twenty-five thousand dollars that Lexington Cuyler received for his collection of shrunken heads has kept him in re-

mote Tibet for over two years now. He has written his daughter that he is unearthing some wonderful scientific discoveries and will soon return to the United States for a visit, and to meet Peter Valentine Lavender, of whom Kate has written so much. The ten thousand dollars reward that Kate and Peter collected for the recovery of the priceless Ispahan, Hammadan, Kashan, and Cossack antiques bought them a fine new car and set them up in a presentable office building, under the firm name of Lavender & Lavender. And prospective buyers remark: "What an odd firm name—Lavender & Lavender! Are you related to each other?"

And Pete invariably answers: "I'll tell the world we are!"

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

REINCARNATION

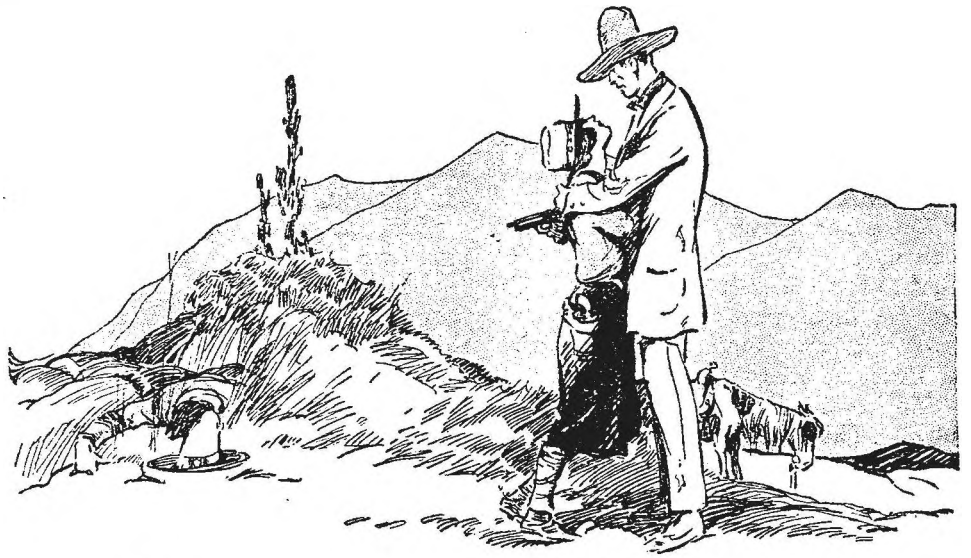
INTO space limitless I look afar—
Through showers of satellites, of suns and star,
And wonder where my future home may be—
When I shall travel o'er that noiseless sea
Of azure, to some still and spectral sphere,
And meet again those near and dearest here
On this old Earth. Shall I, remembering, know
That we were playmates in the long ago?

Shall I there wander 'neath the sultry palm,
Still silent sentry of the tropic calm,
And hear again a name my heart should know
As through the vales of memory I go?
Perhaps this Earth then as a moon will stay,
Its chilling finger pointing out the way—
Where you will wait beside the yucca tree,
As once you waited on this Earth for me?

Or am I bound alas to Earth and fear,
Having attained no real perfection here,
But chained by self, must I again return
To gain the lessons I have failed to learn?
Perchance one gleam of higher self will shine,
To light the pathway to a life sublime,
That I may rise above this sordid Earth,
Freed from the fetters I have forged each birth.

Perhaps I yet may gaze in space and see
This now the Earth, shine as a star to me,
May hear it called by yet another name,
And memory fail to know it for the same.
Oh, Lords of Karma, grant me but the prayer—
To know her face in the assemblage there,
And I will care not, be it great or small,
Which is my star—or be there star at all.

Marie Saltus.



Loretta Brodell

By KIM NIGHT

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

JAMES CHILTON, member of an exclusive New York club, poloist, veteran of the late great war, *et cetera*, is an admirer of six-gun literature. He visualizes the club library as a desert saloon and his eagle eye detects a fellow member cheating at cards. Chilton knocks this Darril Morduant down and the cheat resigns from the club. But Morduant is found murdered a few hours later, and Chilton had threatened to kill him on sight. Chilton flees, to deflect suspicion from a fellow clubman who likewise quarreled with Morduant, and heads for the Arizona desert, of which he has read much. On a Santa Fe train he knocks insensible a New York detective who is trailing him, stops the train and escapes afoot in the sandy waste. The detective enlists the three belligerent Brodells—Skeeter, Jack, and Buckshot—to run down the innocent fugitive for the ten thousand dollar reward. They are terrific fighters and would scorn to pursue a tenderfoot, but he is headed for their ranch, where they have left their sister. Meanwhile, Chilton has sought haven from a bandit gang, and the young and lovely Loretta Brodell promises to aid him.

CHAPTER IX.

ALLY.

AT the window the girl saw a posse of four riders widely deployed at first, then gathering together on the trail that came down out of Goldpan Cañon. The girl knew at a glance that her brothers were not among them.

It was only a moment before they galloped down past the outermost corral of the ranch, and headed up toward the main ranch house. As they passed the shack window where the girl was, they drew their mounts up to a walk.

She looked at them: they were strangers. Alkali dust covered their sombreros, their black shirts, their gauntlets, their big boots. One of them—a Mexican breed probably—wore a big straw sombrero. Another wore leather chaps. A third—a tiny mouse-eyed fellow with a haggard yellow

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 25

face wore an alpaca coat drawn together by a cartridge belt.

The leader was a big man, riding a stocky pinto. He turned his flat expressionless face upon the girl, and the corners of his mouth, which were widened by stains of tobacco juice, lifted in a suave grin.

"Go on and search the ranch," he said to his men. "I'll talk to this gal." He turned to her. She felt a slight shock. He made her flesh creep with that high soft voice: "I reckon you're the owner of this here hacienda, miss?" he said.

"I'm Loretta Brodell," the girl replied coldly. "This is the Brodell outfit." She found herself fingering her six-gun. She glanced back over her shoulder into the darkness, where Jim Chilton was waiting breathlessly, ready to open fire upon the first man that entered that shack. The girl caught but a glimpse of his long face, white forehead, the piercing gray eyes.

She looked back at the face of the horseman. Again that strange power that women have in crises—a power called intuition, compounded of insight, fear, of the horror of taking life, of a strange sense of justice, of a miraculous quickness in conclusions—this intuition told her that the horseman was pursuing a man less guilty than himself.

The girl asked with a toss of her head: "What do you want?"

"I cain't say that we horsed in here for to ask a favor of a lady," the rider answered softly. "We thought we could do *you* a favor. By that I mean we kin give you some information which it will save you a heap of trouble. I'm advisin' you, miss, to git heeled. And git all your ranch hands heeled likewise. They's a two-gun man which jumped the train up to the Santa Fe spur. And we've trailed him all the way down through Goldpan Cañon."

"A two-gun man, you say?" the girl asked.

"He's wanted back to New York," the horseman explained readily. "You know what them New York criminals is. They ain't like the boys out here in the West. Don't give their victims a chanst. Pot 'em on sight. They've chased this here man all the way from New York to Arizona. Got deputies all over the U-nited States huntin' him.

"They seem to want him more than we want bandits in these parts. That's why I've tole my men to drop him soon's they see him. All as I wanted to say, miss, is that you look sharp."

"Did you see him come this way?" the girl asked.

"He was headin' for the ranch. Last we seen of him he disappeared in the brush up thar at the mouth of the cañon. A couple of my men was ridin' on the cañon rim, scourin' the top of the mesa. Me and another of my men rode down through the cañon. Couldn't have missed him. We drove him out all righto. And he ain't made for the open plain so fur as I can figure. No trace of him thar. We seen three horsemen comin' thisaway, which I figure they're your brothers."

"I didn't know my brothers were coming home," the girl said.

"Whoever they are they was enough to scare the gunman off'n the plain."

The three other strangers returned from their search.

"No sign of him anywheres, chief. We seen a Mex woman and she said he ain't been here. We seen a couple old mozos down by a hoss corral, and they ain't seen nobody."

"I reckon he must have stayed clear of the ranch," the girl said.

"Yes, that's most likely," the leader agreed. "He wouldn't go horsin' into a ranch in broad daylight. Except we figured he might be keelin' over with thirst. It shore was like a volcano up thar in the cañon. Wall, we'll shag along, miss. We'll comb the mesquite some more, and scout around in them barrancas in the west. Like as not he's hidin' thar. We'll git him right soon though. Ain't no doubt about that."

He laughed in his assurance. "The poor coot's *on foot*. Further and more if we don't git him—the sun'll git him!"

He turned and rode off toward the western end of the ranch, followed by his three men. As he left the girl he called out to her: "If you-all see any signs of him, miss, let us know—and we'll rope him for you. They's a reward for him: ten thousand dol-

lars! Keep your eye peeled and might you'll git a slice of the reward yourself."

As the girl turned into the room Chilton spoke with a tense, triumphant voice: "Look here, little girl, what made you do that?"

Her smooth forehead darkened and she did not answer.

"Do you mean you're going to help me?" he persisted.

"No, I can't help you. It's beyond my power. My brothers will get you. They're coming. That settles everything. You said you saw three riders coming across the plain: they are my brothers most likely. If they're going to catch you, what have I to do with it?"

"Just why didn't you turn me over to those men?"

She laughed uneasily. It was hard to explain. She had an indefinite impression, something that she could not put in words. She was going to tell him of how that horseman, the leader of the four, had affected her. He seemed malignant, powerful. Whereas this fugitive seemed so helpless in her hands—and so innocent! Like a deer hounded by desert loboes. But she made no such explanation to Jim Chilton.

"I'm not sure about those strangers. I am sure about my brothers. And that horseman said something about shooting you on sight—because you were a New York gunman. My brothers at least would give you a fair chance."

"Then you prefer to turn me over to your brothers?" Chilton asked. "If that's the case I better not wait any longer."

"You think you can get away from *them?*" She smiled as a woman might smile upon an amusing little boy. His answer was to turn to the door, but she stopped him with an abrupt gesture, and then said angrily: "Do you think I will let you go, broken by the sun—thirst, and all? I don't think any woman can do that."

Chilton flushed. He was at her mercy—unconditionally. First he had had to beg for his life. Now she was enjoying making him eat out of her hand.

"I'm going to the kitchen," she said. "I'll send the Mexican woman out. You follow when you see her going down there to the calf-sheds. I'll give you food and water."

She added as if trying to condone her deed of mercy: "Surely there can't be any harm in that. But if my brothers ever find out!" She did not finish. Instead as if afraid of faltering she ran out the door and disappeared in the direction of the cook shack.

A moment later the Mexican woman came out and waddled down toward the cow-corrals, her broad face as expressionless as a mud mask, in which her coal black eyes gleamed through tight slits.

When the path was clear Chilton slipped out and ran to the long low shack which was the kitchen and chowhouse. The girl held out a tin dipper of water. As he drank she started to break some eggs on a frying pan, cut some slices of bacon and bread, fried the bread in a mixture of eggs and wine, making him a dish of torrijas—a delicacy which the old Mexican had taught her.

He ate, standing in the middle of the floor while she handed him his food as if to a tramp at a door step.

The pallor left his face, his eyes brightened. The girl watched him with a vital interest. She still was bewildered. She stared at him as if entranced, as if she had stumbled onto some strange and powerful sort of animal in a mountain lair—unrecognizable, dangerous, unbelievable.

Her anxious look thrilled him. He looked down upon her face, his fierce gray eyes intent upon her mouth. He stepped to her.

"You believe that you're helping an innocent man. I can see that."

"I know nothing—" she began.

"You saved me from that posse. And here you are giving me water, food, even though you know that in helping me you are siding against your brothers."

"God forbid! They're always fighting for the right—strong, big men that can not be beaten! *I* go against my brothers? Why no one in the world can go against them!"

"You have gone against them! Why? Because you're putting your trust in a stranger that came staggering in here out of the desert, hounded for murder." He

could see her eyes gleaming in response to the light in his. "What can I do? All I can do is to ask you to help me still more. You've put your trust in me. I must trust you!"

She waited. He tore out a sheet from a little note book which he carried in his hip pocket.

"Read this note." He had addressed it to Dr. Rivers in New York:

"*Advise me here—*"

"What is this ranch?" Chilton asked.

"The Box-B, Cobb's Coulee."

He put this down, adding, "Care of Loretta Brodell," then signed the note and handed it to her.

"And what am I to do with this?" she asked.

"Telegraph it to New York. Here is some money. It will save my life."

"But what does this mean?"

"That I cannot explain now. But I promise to explain it all to you—as soon as you get the answer."

"The answer here—sent to *me!*" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair.

He smiled at her desperate concern. "When you receive the answer there will be nothing more to fear—from the law, or from your brothers—or from me."

"The truth—" she began.

"You will know the truth if you will trust me now. The fact is you may save my life if you send this message."

She answered quickly, holding the paper out to him: "If I sent this my brothers would tell me I'm untrue to their blood! It is a dreadful thing you ask! It is like the work of a spy! How can I help you—an enemy of the law, when my brothers are the only three men against all the lawlessness of this range!"

"If they are your brothers, they are not my enemies!"

She caught him up at this; and cried eagerly: "Very well then, if you meet them and resist them it will be a gun-fight. They will kill you. I have no doubt about that? But you might kill one of them first!"

"I'll make this bargain: You have saved my life. Your brothers are safe from my hand."

Her face was suddenly radiant. All her fears thus far which had been for the safety of those three heroes of hers were now dispelled. Her mouth, until now stern, unyielding—softened. It seemed as if she had been grabbing for a straw, had caught it and it had saved her! That straw was, on the face of things, pitiably insignificant: only the word of a stranger who was fleeing the law! But yet—

She folded the little paper he had written and tucked it into her bosom. "I will send it."

He took her hand, which this time she did not withhold. He thought of a conventional phrase or two but they were all banal, utterly ridiculous.

Here was a woman saving a man who had no jot of proof of being innocent. Could he thank her? Could he promise to repay her?

He bent down and kissed her hand. Gentle as the kiss was, she evoked again that other gesture of his—when he crushed his hot, strong palm against her lips.

CHAPTER X.

"MY LIFE IS YOURS!"

BEFORE Jim Chilton could get started on the trail there was a matter of most vital importance to be attended to. The delay might have angered any one who was without the uncanny composure which characterized Chilton.

A young woman shows a caller the family photographs primarily as a pastime. And in most instances it is a pastime provocative of impatience. Imagine what it meant to a man like Jim Chilton, all but cornered by two different posses—to have the girl lead him into the sitting room of the main ranch house, for no other reason than to show him the pictures of her brothers!

Worst of all, she was not satisfied in his giving a cursory glance. She led him to each one, and insisted upon his taking in every detail. No girl ever showed her impatient lover the family album with such fervid anxiety as Loretta showed this fugitive the portraits of the Brodell brothers.

Chilton stood up by the table, his bared head almost touching the rafters of the little ranch house parlor. On the table were an oil lamp, a Hopi jug, an elaborately woven Indian basket filled with post cards from the overland routes. A plush-covered album decorated with sea-shells and mother-of-pearl contained two of the photographs.

One was of Skeeter Brodell. His poker face looked strangely glum, pale, expressionless, for the photograph failed to give the vivifying touch of beet red on the cheekbones, the nose, the sharp chin. The long thin mustaches were well-combed, dampened and adjusted — probably done under the supervision of the Tucson photographer.

Some one likewise had prevailed upon Skeeter, in those earlier days of his career, to wear a wing collar. In a broad cravat of polka dots there was the one badge of Skeeter's character—a horseshe pin.

" It was taken a long time ago," the girl explained. " But you could recognize him if you looked hard enough. He won't be wearing a coat and collar. It'll be a sombrero, and a striped shirt—either green or orange. But if you were uncertain about the face you couldn't possibly miss recognizing those hands."

Jim Chilton noted the long thin fingers, the narrow palm, the veins and tendons covered seemingly with skin but without flesh. They were composed, resting on his crossed knee with a peculiar naturalness. The photographer had forgotten to tell him what to do with those hands, with the result that they were the only natural detail in his uncomfortable position.

They were the one graceful touch to an ungainly and awkward figure. Jim Chilton formed a definite picture because of those hands, that horseshoe diamond pin, and that poker face. They were the hands of an inveterate gambler.

" The hands of an artist!" the girl said proudly.

She pointed to the photograph on the opposite page of the album. There was a square-jowled fellow with tremendous shoulders and apparently no neck to put a collar on of whatever sort. Hair that was naturally wavy had been plastered down hiding a forehead that was none too high to start with.

And yet for all these concomitants of the brute fighter, there seemed nothing brutish about this face. The eyes were large, dreamy, and the photograph had failed to show the fact that they were ordinarily bloodshot by overdrinking.

" I would also remember this man, by his hands," Chilton said. " If your other brother had the hands of an artist, this man has the hands of a great fighter." There was no denying that. The chunky fists, one of them doubled—even in that photograph—looked like mallet heads.

" Every man on this range is afraid of those hands," the girl said. " Buckshot Brodell they call him. And every one on this range loves him—as they love a big brother."

" I will remember him," Chilton said. " You need have no fears about that."

" And remember this boy," she said in an eager, proud voice, as she closed the album and pointed a brightly colored enlargement of a photograph on the wall.

It was set between a photograph of the girl's father and mother. On the lacy gilt frame hung a pair of Spanish rowels, picturesquely genuine in contrast to the cheap and gaudy portrait. It was the portrait of a handsome and romantic looking youth with a violin. The lips and cheeks were tinted a vivid red, the eyes black, the hair a yellowish brown. Somehow from that assortment of raw colors, the boy suggested not a rouged cantina girl, but a man, quick-eyed, courageous, fierce of temper.

The violin, of course, was a ridiculous touch, and so was the flowing tie of apple green. They made it impossible to guess the character of the boy—unless you looked down to the detail which had given the key to the two brothers—his hands.

" A musician's hands. You can remember him by that."

To say they were the hands of a violinist was stretching a point somewhat. They were certainly the hands of a Brodell—slim, long fingered, with the appearance of agility even in repose; with the suggestion of a smashing power even though delicately constructed.

"Those are the three men who will pursue you," the girl exclaimed. "I can hold them back for a very short while—an hour perhaps. And then they will be on your trail. I will give you a horse—the fastest one here. No, that's not treachery—against my own blood. I am doing it hoping that they won't catch you, and fight you. They might corner you—force you to fire on them—"

"I have given my word about that," Chilton declared. "I will not raise my hand against these three men."

"Can you remember their faces?" she asked anxiously. "Can you remember this boy?" They were still before the portrait of Jack. "Can you see how young he is? Can you see how good, how courageous, how care-free? If anything happened to him through this act of mine—"

"I promise you, before God, I will not raise a finger against him." He added one thing more, as a chivalrous compliment to her youngest and favorite brother: "I shall only flee him—that is all!"

It was the first time he had put himself in the position of a man in flight. He seemed so calm, so easy in every movement, so gracious in every word, that the girl had failed totally in picturing him as a fugitive. All that she could picture was a man who walked while those who pursued him rode!

"I am ready then to help you," she said. "Here is a canteen. Here is a sombrero. You'll need them for the trail you're going to take."

Hastily she threw some provisions into a duffle bag—flour for flapjacks, some cans of beans, coffee. She then led him out through the back of the ranch house toward one of the corrals. A gaunt red roan answered to the girl's call. "There's your saddle," she said to Chilton.

A row of Mexican cowboy saddles, slung over a rail, offered Chilton a variety of strange contraptions. He chose the smallest one, which seemed tremendous compared to the saddles he was used to riding in the East. He swung this to the horse's back, remembering from his extensive reading in Western fiction that they used no saddle blankets in the desert country.

As he mounted, he took a short hold of the reins and grasped the pommel with the left hand—a gesture which the girl considered the strangest and most fascinating she had seen this bewildering man perform. She judged he had mounted in this peculiar way solely so that he could hold out his right hand to her.

She clasped it just as her three brothers came loping easily up the Cobb's Coulee road.

"Ride into this barranca," she ordered quickly. "Keep to the sand so they won't hear you. When you come out of the barranca head cross the plain for a red mesa over there;" she pointed west. "You'll find a water-hole there. Remember, I can keep them back only an hour at the most—then they'll be on your trail."

He felt her clinging to his hand. The fact was, she was confident that he would be taken—perhaps killed. Her brothers had never failed. Yet she could not help being convinced by his supreme confidence, as he said: "I will be back." He added: "If they chase me across the border, I will be back sooner or later, anyway, to pay my debt. I owe my life to you."

Both of her hands were gripping his. The sound of hoof-beats startled her. He reached down, drawing her hands upwards to his lips. He phrased the same sentence again in a different way:

"My life is yours!"

He gathered his reins, pressed his horse to a run. When she saw him riding down into the narrow sand wash of the barranca, she was again struck with the strangeness, the fascination of everything he did: the way he sat that hard-riding roan, like the way he mounted, was new to her.

He did not jog and bump along like the cowboys. His manner, his talk, his composure when hounded, his easy seat on that rough-gaited horse—all this fascinated her. He was a man from another world. She wondered as she saw him speed in haste away whether her brothers could really beat him!

Her heart fluttering with that first rough contact which she could not forget; her hands trembling at her breast; her mouth still seeming to burn with the impression

of his hot palm—she went down toward the road to meet her brothers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEEN CAN DO NO WRONG.

A TALL angular fellow with drooping mustaches, a glum brick red face; a lumbering giant with flushed cheeks, a boy with black eyes and a jaunty air—these were the three Brodell brothers jogging and bouncing along on their cow-ponies, into the yard of the Box-B outfit.

Jack Brodell, the youngest and most impatient of the trio, spurred his horse to a gallop when he saw his sister.

"Hello, maw! Anything happened? Aint had a scare, have you? No raid been pulled off here? No bandits showed up yet?"

He leaped from his horse and embraced his sister. The two older brothers had outgrown this ritual—Skeeter because he was fundamentally averse to showing his emotions in playing poker as well as in playing life; Buckshot, because he always had to explain why his eyes were so pale, his lips so loose, and his feet so wobbly when he swore he had never touched a drop of liquor in Cobb's Coulee since the first of January.

But when Skeeter and Buck dismounted, the sister—according to her custom embraced both.

"You see, it's the way," Buck explained sheepishly. He was never sheepish except in the presence of his sister. "I got into a mix-up last night with four breeds. Floored every one of 'em. But bein' a bit sore this mornin', the vet he give me rub-down with liniment. Smell it on me? Hoss liniment. Makes me stink somethin' awful. Bet you thought I been guzzlin—"

Jack interrupted impatiently. "Come on, Buck, we ain't got time for that. You're boiled—and maw she knows it, as well as us three. Maw, we're goin' to trail a gunman, and Skeeter he says we'll start soon as you git us a meal."

"What gunman are you after, boy?" she asked.

Skeeter, who had left his horse and was headed for the ranch house, turned back. He looked at his sister's face.

Jack hastened to the point: "We figured he would head down through the cañon and might stop here for to water hisself, and git some feed. That's why we hurried over from Cobb's Coulee. Was afraid you might meet up with him—and he'd see you're the prettiest gal in the State and—"

"Now that we're here we kin take our time," Buck said. "You aint' seen any signs of him—a tenderfoot trailin' along without no hoss?"

The girl felt the sharp eyes of her eldest brother Skeeter boring into her. Skeeter—she had always believed from her infancy—knew every time any one lied. Furthermore, he knew everything that was ever in a man's thoughts—or a woman's. That's why he couldn't be downed in poker.

She believed also that Skeeter knew everything that happened between Mesquite and Cobb's Coulee, or else guessed at it, and always guessed right. When she remembered that strange, gray-eyed man—the first who had ever crushed her in his arms—she resolved to lie. But she knew perfectly well that she couldn't lie with her face toward Skeeter.

She turned instead to young Jack. He was easy to lie to. He believed everything his sister said ever since she affirmed that Santa Claus was a witch doctor who sailed across the desert with a team of moose.

"What gunman *are* you talking about?" she asked.

"He ain't seen her," Jack said.

"No, he ain't been here yet. So there's plenty of time," Buck remarked. "We'll eat, then trail after him when we git good and ready. If you two men want to stay here and protect maw, I'll git him myself."

She felt Skeeter's eyes boring into the back of her head. She hurried to ask: "Who is he? What's he done? Why did you come all the way from Cobb's Coulee—*three* of you—to get one man?"

Jack blushed at this. "That's what I said all along! I'd have went after him alone. But we got scairt because of you bein' here while Skeeter he was gamblin' down to town, and Buck he was guzzlin'. So I allowed we'd better all three come."

Buck found it necessary to bolster up his own reputation. While the girl and her elder brother came suddenly into a combat of glances, Buck elaborated: "It's a gunman from New York. Killed we don't know how many hombres back there. Cold blooded murderer. On the Overland he smashed up three detectives and a conductor.

"Waren't satisfied with that—but ackcherly wrecked the train—not the Overland, but the way train on the spur. Don't know how many was killed. Then he headed off in the mesquite, and the last they seen of him he was on foot, fightin' agin seven Hopis, which he killed three of 'em, and the others ain't been heard from since."

"Like as not he chawed 'em up, bein' he didn't have no grub outfit," Jack said disgustedly.

For the first time since arriving at the ranch, Skeeter spoke. While his brothers were shooting into the air with their ideas, Skeeter hit a bull's eye.

"Some one's told a powerful big lie."

He was looking at the girl when he said this. She understood just what he meant. Jack likewise was quick enough to see that something had happened. But Buck, the affable, the slow, the honest, the inebriated, did not understand.

"A lie?" he cried belligerently. "Powerful big lie?" He doubled his mallet fists and then grinned: "Wall, I reckon maybe I stretched a point thar about the Hopis. But the rest is true. Ain't no question about that."

"Look here, Skeeter!" Jack flared. "Who-all's told this here lie?"

"He doesn't believe what I said," the girl announced as if to placate her younger brother. "He probably saw some riders heading out there toward the desert. I didn't explain to you boys that a posse was here before you were. They were in search of the same man."

Skeeter said nothing. It was as usual. When he said nothing he might have a pair of deuces or four of a kind; there was no telling. Again the girl looked at him with the courage, the calmness, the straightforwardness that Skeeter recognized as the usual signs of bluff.

"Skeeter, if you-all ever make the suggestion which maw ain't always right, this here Brodell combination breaks here and now. And it's me or you for a—"

"I ain't overly pleased with what I got to say," Skeeter interrupted softly. Jack knew enough to check himself. Buck's red eyes bulged. Something very serious and dramatic had escaped him until now.

"You ain't sayin' anything agin *her*, Skeeter!" he growled.

"No, I ain't. I'm the last one to say anythin' agin her. Jack bein' a yearling without no savvy to start with, got me all wrong. I didn't say the gal waren't in the right. Maw's always in the right. And if she ain't—it's all right anyways. Us three—we make it right.

"What I said is this: The gunman's most likely been here. He's bribed some ranch hand for to hide him. Or else he's bribed 'em for to give him a grub stake and most like—a mount! The gal has found it out, and bein' tender of heart she knows we'll kill whoever has went agin us, and so she's shieldin' 'em. That's my opinion."

"Is he right, maw?" Buckshot asked in a pleading, heart-rending tone. "Don't say he's right!"

"He's wrong," Loretta Brodell said.

"There y'are! I told you!" Buck cried triumphantly. "If she know'd any one went agin us, and was so plumb yaller as to help some one which we're after, she'd show 'em up! She wouldn't let no one go agin us! She knows what the word Brodell means! She knows our blood—"

"Oh, for hell's sake!" Jack exploded. "Let some one who's sober talk. Lookee here, maw. Skeeter he's as hard as a coyote trap. Ain't no mercy about him when some one of his own outfit shows a streak of Mex' blood. Skeeter he'll shoot any one down who pretends to be on his side and then ain't.

"But you're different, maw. If you figgered some yaller Mex' on our ranch turned traitor and helped our man escape, you'd at least pity him enough to keep him out'n Skeeter's clutches. If you don't want to tell us the hombre's been here, all righto. I'm satisfied. We'll shore git him anyway. You don't mix up with it.

But be shore of this also, maw, I'll find out who's gone agin us, and I'll make him pay!" He softened his threat seeing the girl turn color even though her mouth was still resolute. "You ain't in it, maw, remember that."

The girl's vivid and agile face was an open book to her eldest brother.

"The hombre's been here," he announced calmly. "Let's go on that as our first clew. That bein' the case we might as well plan our next move. Most likely he's got a horse and is headin' south, which it means we better git on the trail pronto. He couldn't of been here long, which means I can overtake him if I ride Brown Bucker."

He again saw the slight change of color in the girl's face. She was courageous enough to keep the smile on her mouth, but no one in the world—Skeeter knew well enough—could check the ebb or flow of blood. He did not know why the mention of Brown Bucker affected her. Of course, the wildest flight of his imagination could not have told him that Brown Bucker—the fastest horse on the ranch—was the mount she had given the fugitive.

"It occurs to me howsomever," Skeeter went on in his quiet drawl, "that this here hellbender ain't so important to our outfit, as the traitor which give him a chanst to escape. That bein' the case I figure we should orter take this whole business quiet-like and find out who the enemy within the camp is—as they say. After that we kin trail this New York murderer who ain't showed no intention of doin' us hurt."

"That thar is a right good idee, Skeeter," Buck said.

"It's good so long as you leave maw out'n it," Jack agreed.

Skeeter gave his final judgment. "Jack you go git all the ranch hands which has been in the outfit for the last couple of hours or so. Tell 'em I want to talk to 'em in the settin' room of the house. Then we-all kin git to the bottom of this here argyment."

It was a very serious "preliminary investigation" that took place there in the main ranch house. The stolid, flat-faced Mexican woman, a half breed mozo, an old cattle-hand who had been asleep in the bunkshed, the three Brodell brothers and their sister—these were the characters who composed the court.

Skeeter Brodell was of course the presiding judge. He had been sheriff some years before, and the dignity of that office had never left him. Whenever a man was summoned by Skeeter Brodell, it was the same as being summoned by the law.

The Mexican cook woman denied having seen anybody except the four horsemen who were in search of the murderer. The woman explained she had been making tortas, when she thought she had heard the girl call to her from the ranch house. Upon this she had left her tortas, hurried to the kitchen of the ranch house, and a short while later the girl had come in and sent her on an errand.

One of the cattle-hands said he had been awakened only that very moment by Jack. The other seemed desperately frightened.

"I ain't done nothin', chief," he cried in answer to Skeeter's quizzing. "All as I know'd was that four riders, led by a big hombre which he looked like a breed—come horsin' onto the ranch ,and woke me out'n a sleep. I seen 'em through the window while I was still in my bunk. Then some time after I seen one of 'em—leastwise I thought it was one of 'em headin' off into the arroyo down thar on a roan hoss which looked like Brown Bucker—'ceptin' only he waren't ridin' so hard as Brown Bucker rides."

He added in a whimpering voice: "That's all I know, chief. You ain't goin' to suspect me of helpin' any one agin you, are you, chief? I ain't done nothin'. I'd cut my hand off afore I'd go agin you. Seems like you must have made some mistake, chief. Ain't no one on the Box-B as would dast go agin you, chief. Nor agin Buckshot, nor agin Jack."

This testimony had a convincing ring of truth to it. And it confused Skeeter and his two brothers, because they also had always maintained that no one "dast go against them"—and particularly no one of their own outfit, where they were worshiped and feared by every hand.

But Skeeter Brodell clung doggedly to his original conviction. He had caught his

sister in telling a lie. He was equally convinced that she had told that lie to shield some one. It was just like her. She knew that Skeeter would stop at nothing to punish a traitor in camp. That was why she was shielding the traitor. It was her innate goodness of heart. But his suspicion of her stopped right there.

" That hellbender has been here," Skeeter declared.

" Might he came here alone," Buckshot proffered, " and got some water and grub and then shagged out without no one seein' him."

" Some one saw him," Skeeter insisted.

Jack saw that his brother was again studying Loretta's face. Solely in order to put a stop to that maddening conflict between his big brother and his sister who could do no wrong, he came to the rescue with a very poignant suggestion:

" If that there murderer came to this ranch on foot, he most like rustled one of our hosses." Jack turned to the old ranchhand: " Look here, ' Heel-fly,' you go into the corral and check up."

" I'll do that, Jack. And I'll check up on the red roans in particular, because that thar hombre I seen ridin' down into the arroyo—he was on a red roan."

Skeeter Brodell, always quiet, self-contained, emitted a low oath. " Don't check up on the cavy," he said. " Find out if my racer is there."

The stable mozo's jaw dropped: " Do you-all mean Brown Bucker, chief? You don't mean—"

" I mean Brown Bucker," Skeeter asserted quietly.

The suspicion that Brown Bucker," had been stolen, threw every one into such alarm that the group in the hot little ranch room waited in silence for the return of the mozo. Buckshot Brodell doubled his fist and stared bewildered, stunned, through the window at the corrals outside.

The cook woman had now succumbed to the fear of the nervous ranch hand. She knew that her master, Skeeter, was a man terrible in anger. He was going to kill some one before this was over, and it was just like him to turn his hate first upon a Mexican.

Jack held his sister's hand. He had the premonition that in the approaching climax she would have to be guarded. Skeeter Brodell, the quiet voiced, the implacable, the pitiless, was a dangerous man when crossed.

Buckshot saw the mozo returning. Without waiting for the mozo's report, Buck reached to the wall for his canteen. There was whisky in that canteen, and Buck knew that the coming situation would demand a good stiff bracer. But now because of some damnable mishap which he could not for the life of him understand the canteen was not there.

" Where's that canteen of mine at, maw!" he cried angrily.

Jack Brodell meanwhile, seeing the mozo come in with a distracted expression on his brown face, could foresee the truth likewise. He reached to the wall for his holster and gun, and for the sombrero which he customarily wore when trailing in the desert.

" Where's my sombrero at, sis?" he asked in amazement.

The girl did not answer, for the mozo's frightened voice demanded every one's attention.

" Chief," he said piteously, and without daring to enter the room, " Brown Bucker ain't in the corral. Don't know what's happened, chief. He was there this afternoon with the rest of the cavy—afore I went to the bunk shed. You ain't blamin' me, chief? You ain't goin' to kill me? I ain't got nothin' to do with it—you don't think that! I'm just a poor ole coot which has to have a siesta in these here hot days, chief—I—"

Skeeter put up his hand. No one in the room dared to speak.

The stable mozo puffed heavily from the exertion of his run; the Mexican cook gibbered prayers under her breath; blowflies at the window pane kept up a hum. Finally, Skeeter spoke:

" Some one in our outfit helped that hombre rustle my horse. Which it's just as bad, and worse, as doin' the actual rustlin'. Hoss-stealin' means only one punishment. I'll do it myself with this here gun. If it's a man in my outfit that's went agin me, he dies. If it's a woman—"

Jack Brodell interrupted: " Look here,

Skeeter, how do you-all know the murderer didn't pick out the hoss hisself and make off with him?"

"Because he'd chose a better lookin' critter," Skeeter replied incisively. "Brown Bucker is the ugliest hoss in the cavy—and likewise the hardest for to call. Some one told the hombre that Brown Bucker was the fastest hoss in the ranch."

He caught sight of the Mexican cook mouthing her incantations. Skeeter had a definite impression that it was she who had helped the fugitive, and that Loretta was afraid to tell on her. "If it's a woman who give that hombre my hoss," Skeeter announced, "I've a good mind to treat her like they did to that Mex witch down to Tampico—and nail horseshoes to her feet!"

The Mexican cook sank to her knees, wailed, wrung her hands.

"She's the guilty one all right, Skeeter," Buckshot said. "My canteen's gone, which means some one took it out of this here room. This ole witch here is the only one of whichever comes into the settin' room."

Jack Brodell considered this a very good point: "It shore looks like she's guilty, Skeeter," he said with great heat. "My sombrero was hangin' here this mornin'. She give the hellbender my sombrero—that's plain enough! And I'm backin' you up—any punishment you figure is just, Skeeter. But no torture—nothin' like that."

"Bein' she's a woman, Skeeter, we cain't exactly give her any physical punishment," Buck Brodell counseled. Both the brothers knew that Skeeter was out of his head—for usually he was the most chivalrous of the three when a woman was concerned. "But any punishment you figure is just, Skeeter, me and Jack agree to."

The old cook, her flabby brown flesh trembling like gelatin, wailed hysterically. She got up from her knees and rushed for the door. The ranch hand standing there blocked the way. "Guilty as hell!" Buck said. The woman screamed. Loretta Brodell went to her:

"All right, boys," she said. "This has gone far enough—frightening a poor old ignorant woman like this." She turned angrily upon Skeeter. "*You* knew perfectly well she had nothing to do with this. You can read her thoughts—just as you read mine. Go on out to your shack, Tita."

Buck was about to object, but Skeeter nodded his head. "Let her go." The fat old Mexican waddled off, weeping and slobbering. Skeeter turned to the stable mozo and the other ranch hand who had been quizzed. "You two shag out'n here good and pronto." They obeyed his command to the letter.

Skeeter then looked at the girl. He did not use the nickname which all three brothers had applied to her ever since she had become the mistress of the Brodell household. To call her "maw" now seemed sacrilegious.

"All right, sis," he said. "I'm waitin' to hear."

Skeeter's face had gone white with anger—leaving ugly splotches on the high bony cheeks, the jaws, the chin. His eyes were pale. He bit his mustache as if gnashing his teeth. The girl had never seen him torn so between his disappointment with her, and his tense fury.

Skeeter whose word was law, Skeeter the first of the Brodells, the representative of the Brodell blood, of power of justice; the dreaded Skeeter—had been tricked. And the one person who had rebelled against him was the person he loved best in all the world—his little sister!

Loretta was thoroughly frightened. To commit a crime and have to face a sheriff or a United States marshal—that would have seemed easier for her. But to face that big brother, who could read every thought, who was omniscient, who was unforgiving—that was an entirely different matter.

She masked her fear with a semblance of defiance: "It was the way you were frightening that poor old Tita. If it hadn't been for that you'd have a hard time getting me to tell you—"

"To tell him what?" asked the puzzled Buck Brodell.

"I helped your man escape. I gave him a grubstake, a sombrero, a canteen for water, and I gave him a horse," Loretta announced.

"You did what?" Buck asked.

The girl was looking at Skeeter. He was not befuddled; he was not surprised; he was not even triumphant that he had forced her confession. He seemed to her very much as he had looked once when he came riding home sitting upright in his saddle, after receiving a gun-wound. The blood was now drained from his face; he was upright, stiff, his gray lips tight; he was—in a word, beaten.

Jack Brodell, who had held his sister's hand tightly in this ordeal, took a different view of the whole affair. It was a tremendous surprise. It was in fact disappointing; because Jack wanted to see just what his big brother would do to the person who stole his favorite horse. But now the whole game was ended, and all bets were off.

" Bein' that maw did it," he said, " there ain't no use palaverin' any more. If she did it—that makes it right."

CHAPTER XII.

TO DESTROY THE OUTLANDER.

"WHAT all's happened?" the lumbering Buck Brodell asked. He was beginning to get mad. They were trying to put something over on him. Jack and his sister were acting most strangely.

" You tell me what all this palaver's about! What's maw so mad at? How come Jack's scairt? What's there to be scairt of? And you thar, Skeeter, how come your lips is quiverin'?"

" Don't you understand, Buck, the girl inquired indulgently. " A man who is wanted for murder came to this outfit; he was on foot; he had to go out to the desert —so that you three wouldn't catch him. I gave him a sombrero; I gave him your canteen; I gave him Skeeter's horse. He has escaped now—and he has some chance. There's the whole story. I've broken the Brodell code."

As Buck Brodell began to see the light, a fit of anger swept over him. He began to swell like a toad. His eyes bulged, his shoulders were raised, what could be seen of his thick short neck became enlarged with tendons and veins. He lifted his mallet fists.

Jack Brodell sickened at the expectation of seeing this giant rend a frail little girl to pieces. He leaped between his sister and the great brute. But Jack had misjudged his brother. Buck was shaking his fists and roaring his oaths—not at the girl, but at the window which looked upon the arroyo.

" He escaped down to the desert, did he! the rotten coyote! Came here and made love to our little gal—did he—the filthy skunk! I'll git him! I'll mash his carcass to a pulp—and leave him rot in the dry wash!"

He whirled around upon Jack, taking a fistful of his vest and pulling the boy toward him: " Look here, you young wart! What the hell do you mean galavantin' around with them cantina gals in town while your little sister is here helpless with a gunman courtin' her!

" And you, too, Skeeter!" he bellowed and frothed. " Gamblin' away all our profits when you orter be home protectin' the little gal! A couple of shag-gutted hoboes I have for brothers!" He swung out again for the empty wall where his canteen had always been waiting for him. " Good God, where can I get a swig! I'm gittin' the D. T.'s!"

Neither Jack nor Skeeter had paid any attention to this tantrum, but from the sheer noise of it they had been unable to speak. When Buckshot changed from shouting to grunting, Jack spoke to his brother:

" What-all are you goin' to do, chief?"

That was indeed the one serious question. Buck and Jack had already forgiven their sister—or rather they had not so much as blamed her to start with. Skeeter was a man of obdurate justice. A story had gone about that when leading a posse after a rustler, he had hanged a halfbreed whom he knew to be his own son. Although there was absolutely no truth to this legend, it clung to Skeeter's name, because it was very easy to believe.

" What-all's the chief goin' to do?" Buck snorted: " What do I care what he's goin' to do? I'm goin' out for a fresh mount, and hop to the trail. That's all there is to be done. You two quarter sections stay here

where you belong and take keer of the gal. I'm trailin'—and I'll have the hell-buster by nightfall, like I promised in the first place. Only I ain't goin' to bring him back. Ef you-all want to see him, go down to the dry wash where the coyotes will be chawin' off his ears when they're ripe. Which it'll be afore to-morrow noon."

"You-all ain't goin' to hold nothin' agin maw, chief," Jack said, still fearful of his big brother's brand of justice.

"Buck, you wait a minute," Skeeter called to his snorting brother. "Me and you and Jack will git this hombre. I reckon in all this gallumpin' nonsense I ain't got to the truth of the matter whatsomever. That is not until this here one-horned yearlin' said what he said." He nodded to the youngest brother.

"Jack said if the gal done somethin', *that makes it right*. And I just been tryin' to figure why I couldn't have thought the same thing—only first—bein' I'm the oldest. The gal has met a man for the first time in her life which she put above our code. Well and good. Jack can understand that. He falls in love every night—with a new gal.

"But the little sister here, she never seen a man until this tenderfoot come along; so natural enough, she makes a mistake. But she did the right thing just the same: to save the life of the first man he ever took a fancy to. Now, then, Buck, he snorts around like a hell-bustin' bull, and likewise makes a very wise remark: while I'm sagebrushin' myself into thinkin' the gal has went agin me, Buck goes crazy mad—not at the gal who is innocent, but at the slick hombre which tricked her."

"He didn't trick me!" the girl flared suddenly.

"There we are," Skeeter said quietly. "She's in love with him."

"I'm not!"

Skeeter concluded in a calm, compelling voice: "Jack was right, and this here stew, Buck, was right. And I'm goin' to line up with my two brothers, and be right myself. Which means we hold nothin' agin the gal, but do hereby pledge—all three of us—to go git the hombre, even if it takes us till the spring drive!"

"And when we git him, *I'm* the one to work him over!" Buckshot affirmed.

Jack held up his hand. "All right, chief, let's git agoin'."

Buck refreshed himself with the famous drink of the chowcart man of Cobb's Coulee. He poured a good swig of Worcestershire sauce into a tin cup, and broke three raw eggs. He came back from the kitchen, kissed his sister good-by, accoutred himself with spurs, holster, gauntlets, sombrero.

"You two fool cowdogs kin come along with me if you-all want. But don't git in the way when I find my man." He lapped the burning sauce from the corners of his bloated lips. "Good-by, maw, we'll be back by to-morry."

Skeeter went to the door, pausing on his way to turn to the girl. He was still mad enough to kill everybody on the range—except of course his sister. In trying to think what horse he could ride, which would be as good for desert travel as Brown Bucker, he was overtaken by another fit of fury.

"If only you hadn't given this hellbender of yours *my* hoss, gal!" he muttered almost under his breath.

"Come on, chief. Let's go git him!" Jack interposed.

The girl knew enough about her eldest brother not to try to kiss him good-by. He went stalking out—six feet two of bone and taut sinew. And the girl could hear him mutter:

"And she give him my hoss!" His oaths were like a soft cold wind. "She shore did what was right when she did that!"

Jack Brodell waited for a brief moment, as he felt his hands being pressed by his sister. He looked down into her face.

Jack was a past master at things of the heart. His brother had just mentioned the point he fell in love with a new girl every night. The two other brothers had understood how the girl could save this murderer. But it was only Jack who considered the possibility that the girl was still frantic concerning his safety.

Jack whispered to her, as his brothers were saddling their broncs: "Do you want us to spare him, maw?"

Loretta's face flamed; she looked at Jack with wide, hungry eyes. Then she said: "I don't want you to go against your brothers, Jack."

The words fell from Jack as if they had been in some strange language. Even if he had heard them, he would not have believed. The radiant face—so easily read by her eldest brother at all times—was now an open book to the youngster, Jack.

He went down leisurely to the corral, saddled a fresh horse, mounted, and followed Skeeter and Buck into the deep arroyo.

CHAPTER XIII.

TREACHERY.

JIM CHILTON'S trail took him through a wilderness of deep cañons, across hot sage plains, into the hotter bottoms of deeply cut barrancas. The first day brought him to the red mesa which the girl had pointed out to him.

The sun went down, and he found himself in the darkness of a ravine which was thickly choked with pepperwood, cactus, mesquite. There was the kind of water here which the prospectors call "gyp" water—brackish, milky, warm. His roan drank it, but Jim drew on his canteen.

He took a cold supper; then, when the night deepened, snatched a few hours' rest in the safety of a narrow draw. Not knowing his horse, he tethered it to a tree-bole. Here it could graze on the tough, drought-resisting forage.

Chilton awoke, finding himself staring upward at a dome of dazzling stars. He got up, saddled his horse, drove down out of the ravine, turned his back upon the Great Bear, and continued heading south.

By morning he found the ravines deeper, rockier, and not so densely choked with pepperwoods and sycamores. There were no more trees even off there in the distant gulches which cut up to the sides of the brilliant mesas. The plains were barer of sage, becoming dotted with barrel cactus and sojuara.

The landscape became more barren, desolate; vegetation was gone, but the color scheme was more varied: the bowlders were of every color, the mesa sides were yellow streaked with green and rust, like the sides of an iron ship under the scupper-holes. Monotony was a thing apart in that scene of rocks and giant cactus and mirages.

Steady as his pace had been Jim had not covered very much ground. He himself realized it. For one thing the winding cañons had confused him. His course was not a straight line by any manner of means. A maze of deep gulches sent him riding first east and northward again.

The sun blazed. His horse was dry. There was no lather on the withers where the saddle had rubbed up the flakes of sweat. Chilton feared his mount was going under with heat stroke.

He slowed his pace, rested the animal at every bit of shade offered by the bowlders, refreshed it at another one of those salt incrusted water-holes.

Then before the morning was over, came the discovery that there were other horsemen in that desert besides himself. He saw them when he came out on the crest of a mesa, up which one of the cañons had led him. There was a cloud of dust on the horizon far to the west. On the east there was another.

Watching these clouds as he jogged along he saw that they were heading south with him, and closing in as they moved. If he kept on riding a dozen miles more, he would reach a point where those two clouds converged.

He did not keep on riding. His horse was fagged. If it succumbed to heat stroke it would be useless to him—useless to any one for many weeks. Instead of keeping doggedly to a southern course, he decided to stop at a mucker's cabin which he saw in a wide, shallow creek bed a few miles to the east.

A man was out in the hot sun pottering about an ore crusher with a mule. Jim Chilton hailed him, as he rode down the sand bank into the dry creek wash. The mucker was a hump-shouldered man with fishy eyes, the color of which had paled in the desert glare.

"Got any water to spare?" Jim asked.

"A little. Have to haul it ten miles. But I never refuse a pard in distress."

Chilton dismounted and went to him. "My horse is fagged out. Can't see how he's kept his pace up in this heat."

"Been trailin' at a good pace?" the man asked.

Chilton smiled, realizing that he was putting himself in a compromising position. "Yes, I have. I'm not a prospector, as you can see."

"Shore are travelin' light," the mucker said. "I figured you was another one of these deputies out huntin' down a gunman which he's escaped from back east."

Chilton took a swig of water from the flask proffered him. "What gunman?" he asked.

"Don't know his history, 'cept that he's desperate. Stole a hoss belongin' to one of the Brodell brothers. That means he ain't got a chanst right there. Zowie, he shore must have been desperate! The riders I seen who joined the posse back thar at Cobb's Coulee — well, they're all sot on shootin' him on sight."

"You've seen this—this posse from Cobb's Coulee, way down here?" Chilton asked, as he watched the little prosecutor pour a big can of water into a bucket.

"I have. Any number of 'em. They's a big reward out for him, and the whole county is up on the trail. Was a deputy here not two hours ago. He told me all about it. First a posse started out from the Santa Fe spur—that was four or five riders. But they couldn't catch him even though the hellbender was on foot. Give 'em the slip and hid hisself in the Box-B outfit. Might you know the Box-B?"

"Yes, I happen to have had a bit of business up there myself not long ago," Chilton said as he busied himself sopping the back of his horse with a wet rag.

"Well, pard, you might know then what a serious business this here man-hunt is, when I tells you that all three of the Brodell brothers is on the trail! Bein' the gunman they're after was on foot every one kind of lost interest, knowin' that the Brodells would get him. One could have got him, let alone three.

"But then came the news to Cobb's Coulee, that the hellbender had rustled Skeeter Brodell's fastest hoss. That meant the Brodells was in for trouble. So every man in every cow outfit around Cobb's Coulee gits his hoss and gun and hits the trail. Why some of 'em was down this fur even yesterday. I shore am sorry for that poor coot when he's found."

"What are you sorry for him for?" Jim asked.

"For what I told ye. They won't give him no chanst. Soon's they see him they'll plug him. Unless he plugs 'em first, which I'm figurin' he'll do, even though they say he is a tenderfoot."

After a moment's thought, Jim Chilton apparently changed the subject.

"You know this part of the country pretty well?"

"I might say so. Been doin' a little pannin' all the ways between the Spur and the Sierra del Aja."

"Why don't you go after this man yourself then? You ought to be able to outwit him if he's an easterner and knows nothing of the lay of the land."

"I ain't no fightin' man," the mucker rejoined. "And they say this hombre is."

"What trail do you think this fugitive would take to elude these posses?" Chilton asked.

"So you're figurin' on trailin' him yourself?" the mucker replied opening his pallid eyes.

"I do. The way to follow a man is to think along his lines; to imagine yourself in his place: Here's a fugitive surrounded practically on all sides; every one trying to intercept his route to the Mexican border. Now if *you* were the fugitive yourself which way would you go?"

The mucker took an extraordinarily long time to ponder this question. He removed his ragged felt hat, scratched his bald head, rubbed his bristly chin, pinched his dry under lip.

"You see, pard, I happen to know the country—and I know what I'd do. But this escaped gunman—he don't know the country, so what I'd do wouldn't exactly give no clew to his actions. Like for instance: I know of a hidden cañon about five miles west over thar. Stumbled onto it one night. Would have fell in if my hoss didn't have the right savvy.

"I explored around and found an entrance on one end which you go into it through two red rocks that meet together overhead. Sort of cave, like. If I was cornered I'd hide in that thar cañon for a couple of days, for the simple reason that no posse would figure that a man headin' for the border would stop to climb down into it."

"Where is this hidden cañon?" Chilton asked.

The man pointed to a miniature mesa of stratified rock in the west. "You see that thar picacho? A mile beyond is where the cañon's at. But as I said you cain't figure out what a tenderfoot would think by figurin' out what a prospector thinks. They just don't nacherly hide or trail in the same places."

"That's quite true," Chilton admitted. "The tenderfoot would probably do the most foolish thing of all, and blunder right into some trap."

"I agree with you there, mister."

"Now in your opinion what do you think is the most foolish thing he could do? Perhaps we could get some inkling of his movements by that method."

Again the mucker racked his brains. "I'd say perhaps the worst thing he could do would be the naturalest: to hit for the Sierra over thar." He pointed to the purple teeth of a jagged range, above a stretch of mirage water. "He'd be caught then for shore, bein' there ain't no water-holes, and bein' the salt silt is so fine that his tracks is like he was on snow, and bein' furthermore that he could be seen for miles."

"Your advice is quite sound," Chilton said. "I'm going after this murderer myself. And I'm going to take the route I think he would take—across to those mountains. For that reason I wish you would stock me up with as much water as you can spare."

"Wall, I'll tell you, pard, I have to haul all this water from a powerful long ways—"

"I'll pay you."

"How much do you want?"

"Give me one of those gallon cans full."

The mention of pay for his water brought life to those ghastly fish-like eyes. The mucker scrambled about, filling a big oil can, looping some hemp about the unwieldy pack, and fastening it to the saddle strings. Chilton paid him. It was not an exorbitant sum, except for the fact that any money taken for water in the desert is exorbitant, and makes the vender an outcast.

Chilton, although ignorant of desert etiquette, sensed this. The little bald man with the fish eyes turned despicable. Chilton narrowed his eyes as he gave him a farewell smile. That smile was as much as to say:

"If you have any sense, Mr. Trade-rat, you won't cross my path again."

The mucker grinned sheepishly, baring yellow teeth. Chilton rode on.

The mucker was quite interested in the course he took. He was so interested in fact that he climbed to the bank of that shallow creek to a point from which he could look across the flat stretch of sand desert.

As he had confidently expected the stranger did not take that course. Where he had gone, the mucker did not know, but he had a very plausible idea. And he capitalized on this idea some time later.

Two horsemen came loping down the bowlder wash toward the mucker's xacalli. They were thirsty, they were exhausted, they were discouraged. The whole range—so they said—was filled with fool riders trying to run down a fugitive murderer, and no sign had been seen of him yet. The Brodell brothers themselves were unable to catch him—for the simple reason that the hell-bender had actually rustled the fastest horse on the range—which belonged to Skeeter Brodell.

"You givin' up so soon?" the pale eyed little mucker asked. "Two big hombres like you—with them saw'd-off shotguns, and them prancin' cayuses."

Prancing was not exactly the word to use in connection with those exhausted, alkali covered mounts, but the mucker appeared to know good desert horses when he saw them, and likewise good deputies.

"Do you two gents reckon you'd have the nerve to stand up and face this gunman when you meet him?"

"We shore do—if we could get a line on where he's at!" one of the riders cried hotly. "How come you ask us any fool question like that?"

"For the reason that little ole Scoop Hardy which is myself, would not!"

"Maybe not. You're only a little seed-wart. Me and my pard here know a thing or two about deadly weapons. We got shot-guns, and six-guns. We got steady hands and good eyes. How come you're questionin' our nerve, when all as we want is to be set on the right trail for to get our man?"

"Well, I'll tell you how come," the mucker rejoined. "The hombre you're after—he's been here."

The two horsemen whistled. They alighted, and fired a volley of questions and oaths at the cringing little mucker.

"I'll tell you, gents. I'll tell you everything. Ain't no hurry. I know where's he at, and he'll be there a good long while. Now all as I heard from them other posses which has been ridin through this cañon was that the whole country is after an escaped murderer which is a tenderfoot.

"Well, this here bird come horsin' in here a couple hours ago. Couldn't tell by his clothes that he was a tenderfoot. Had a fancy enough lookin' suit, but I seen many a Mex go up to the emporium at Mesquite and git a suit with stripes and such, and then put on a pair of boots and a sombrero. That's what this bird was rigged out like.

"But I seen he was a tenderfoot the moment he got off'n his horse. Imagine a man in the desert comin' up to the other—like he did to me, and not whirlin' his hoss around so's he could alight on the near side!"

The deputies nodded. "Go on, hombre," they said eagerly.

"Then on top of that I seen him alight by gittin' a holt on the cantle with his right hand!"

"You mean to say you let him git on wunst he got off!" one of the deputies snorted disgustedly.

"Ah, now you've mentioned a point!" little Scoop Hardy said. "I know'd he was the man you're all after when he first opened his mouth. Dropped the ends of his words: like for instance he didn't say the 't' on wunst. So I knew by that he was a tenderfoot.

"Then when I went after some water for him and some hemp for to make a pack I got my six-gun. I was goin' to jolly him along a bit more and then shoot him when I had my chanst. But I didn't git the chanst. Somehow or other that thar coot read my mind. Has gray eyes like the bore of them guns of yourn.

"Even then I might have plugged him when he turned his back, but somethin' happened: I let him pay for the water he took. Fair enough. I have to haul it for miles. And he give the nastiest look I ever seen a rattler give a human bein'. My nerve went—zip! like that. If I hadn't took that money—one measly dollar—I'd have won out. But that one dollar cost me—"

"It cost you ten thousand!" one of the strangers said with a grim chuckle. "Now what you-all better do, hombre, is to tell us which trail he took so's we kin catch him."

The fishy-eyed mucker straightened up. He was a man who lost his nerve when considering big sums of money like ten thousand, but in very small amounts he showed tremendous courage.

"Are you gents good gamblers?" he asked tersely.

"What'n the hell has that to do with it?"

"I'll tell you: If you-all are good gamblers, I got a very attractive proposition which I'll offer it to you. I got this bird trapped. I'll tell you where. All as you have to do is go and plug him. You don't have to capture him. The reward I heard tell is yourn whether your man is dead or alive."

"Where's the trap at?" both men asked in unison.

"That's where you-all put up your ante."

"You mean we have to pay you for givin' us that information—and before we git our reward!" the others cried derisively.

"That's where you do the gambling. It's ten to one you git him. I ain't axin' for no whack-up on the reward, because I ain't takin' the chanst myself. It's you who are doin' the gamblin'. All as I git is one hundred dollars to show you a sure way of gettin' this hombre. Then you git ten thousand. You're bettin' on the short end of a hundred to one!"

"Leave him tell us," one of the deputies said. "Sounds all right. If he's comin' injun on us we'll come back and kill him."

The other took out his roll. It amounted to about half the sum. They counted it. Between the two deputies—a fact which surprised the little mucker—they had enough to put up the "ante."

"You shore are a little skunk, hombre!" one of the men said as he handed over the money. "Now tell us. And if our man ain't thar, we advise you not to be here—when we git back."

"You'll find him in the box-cañon on t'other side of that picacho," Scoop Hardy said. "I know he's there, because he axed me particular just where I'd trail to if I was surrounded. If he ain't there I'm a slab-sided liar—"

"If he ain't there you're as good as daid!" called one of the men, as they mounted and galloped off toward the cañon.

"On the other hand if he's tellin' the truth, it looks like an easy job," the other deputy remarked to his partner. "That there cañon is called the Devil's Trap. One man could hold a regiment back, bein' there's two granite bowlders at the mouth which are close together, and which make the only ways you kin go in or out."

"That bein' the case, pard," the other rider said, "it looks to me like as if us two and a regiment is in the same fix!"

They both thought over this grave possibility as they galloped along. Finally they arrived at the solution:

"The thing to do is to throw on him afore he says a word."

"A good idea," said the other. "Particular when you call to mind what that mucker back there said about losin' his nerve when the hombre bored into him with his eyes."

CHAPTER XIV.

WOMAN'S INTUITION.

WHILE her brothers were riding the desert range to the south in search of the fugitive, Loretta Brodell was engaged in a mission of her own. Primarily that mission consisted in nerve-racking suspense as she waited for the answer to Chilton's telegram. Immediately upon the departure of her brothers she had sent the telegram to New York as Chilton had directed.

This meant a long ride to the station at Cobb's Coulee. She would not, of course, trust the errand to any one else. Once it was sent, however, there was nothing for her to do but to return to the ranch. She had left one of her servants—an old ranch hand—in town, with instructions to bring the answer out to her the instant it was received.

The nerve-racking suspense under which she was laboring consisted in waiting for two eventualities: the answer to her telegram, and the news of the capture; or what was more probable, the death of the fugitive.

The fact of the matter was her suspense was of short duration. "Heel-fly," the old ranch hand, returned one morning from the telegraph office at Cobb's Coulee and handed Loretta Brodell a piece of paper. Heel-fly did not know what the message said. He could not read.

But when the girl took it, feverishly unfolded the paper, read it and changed color, Heel-fly was quite certain of one thing: the contents of that telegram were of enormous import. He saw the girl crumple the paper and thrust it into her bosom.

Without a word to any one she slapped on her sombrero and her gauntlets; filled a canteen, a duffle bag with provisions, saddled her best desert bronco, and hit out for the trail.

It was a merciless ride. She did not care for the life of her mount. What she cared for was the life of Jim Chilton. It appeared at first a hopeless task. She was hunting for some one who was fleeing every rider in that county. And the reason for her breakneck race down into the desert was this: she knew that to save this man she must find him before he killed one of his pursuers!

It was a day's ride crossing the cattle run where her brothers' herds were scattered; a short cut over a rocky pass through the sierra, a final spurt in the cool of the night by the light of the stars, and she reached

a little desert town which prospectors and other desert wanderers kept alive as an outfitting station. Her sturdy little bronco had broken under the strain.

They knew the Brodells here at this little ghost town. The Brodells were feared and honored in Seven Mules. It was a common thing for the brothers to ride down there on the trail of a fugitive. But this was the first time that the Brodell girl had come down on such a chase.

The handful of desert-scarred characters helped her in every way. She was given a fresh mount. The proprietor of the outfitting post gave her a room where she snatched an hour's sleep. Two old grizzled prospectors invited her to their shack for a breakfast of coffee and bacon and flapjacks. The entire citizenry of Seven Mules crowded at the door and window of the tiny shack while the girl ate. They were all old men. The young men had already hit the trail, hoping for some of that reward.

" Your brother Buckshot—he was here last night," one of the citizens said. " He was powerful dry and we had a celebration. Buck he said we might as well celebrate the capture of the tenderfoot—which he guaranteed would be done by this mornin' at sunrise."

" Buck—he said he'd 'a' caught the hombre by sunset yesterday if it hadn't been for the hombre's hoss which it belonged to Skeeter."

" Buck—he got likkered up," another citizen, the barkeep, said. " And we got to worryin' whether he'd be able to hold his own when he met up with this tenderfoot. So Buck told us to carry him out to the street, bein' he was too likkered to walk, and while two of us held him up he shot his initials in a snubbin' post which was down t'other end of the street past three dance-halls, four gamin' parlors and seven saloons. So we all told him to likker up some more and he'd be able to pick off a troop of racin' Apaches, let alone one poor tenderfoot."

" Which way did he go?" the girl asked eagerly.

" Headed for Borax Mesa—which speakin' along general lines is southwest. Buck he said he'd have his man daid or alive by this mornin' shore."

" Your kid brother Jack—he come along a little later," another barkeep announced. " Took a snootful, ate a tamale, played us a couple of dances on my old banjo—best tunes I ever did hear—and then hit the trail agin."

" Which way?" the girl asked in the same tone, as she was finishing her plate of flapjacks.

" Headed for the Sierra del Aja which it's direct south."

A third barkeep spoke up: " Your brother Skeeter, he come horsin' in with a grim smile, and filled up with enough chow for to feed a tribe of Flathead squaws. Said his hoss needed an hour's rest, but he'd spend the time playin' a hand or two with the gentlemen of Seven Mules. Stud rested him more'n sleep, he said."

" Cleaned me out'n six months' pannin'," a prospector said proudly.

" Not to mention myself!" three other men added.

" Which way did he go?" the girl asked.

" Skeeter—he didn't say," was the answer the girl expected, and the answer she received.

The girl had finished her meal, had slept her hour, had changed her mount and was outfitted for another day on the trail. Without any further words she mounted her horse, and sped down the broad, dusty street of Seven Mules. The little group of prospectors, barkeeps and renegades waved her farewell, as she galloped past the empty warped shacks, out on the flat cactus dotted desert.

A scorching ride all that day brought her to the southern end of the unbroken plain. Toward the latter part of the afternoon she guided herself by a dust-cloud that grew larger, sharper, and that turned from purple to a faint brown as she neared it. After a ride during which she pressed her mount to its utmost strength, she saw a posse of horsemen emerge from the cloud.

They were coming toward her—a bedraggled crew of dust-covered riders on shambling, exhausted broncs.

Loretta drew up as they met. " Have they found him? What's happened? Where are my brothers? Why are you all riding up this way?" she asked excitedly.

" It's the Brodell gal," one of the riders

said. "We been trailin' that thar hellbender who rustled your brother's hoss. No, we ain't had any luck. Skeeter Brodell's hoss—that's what done it."

"Skeeter and his two brothers they've rode on further south," another man said. "And it's my opinion they're off the trail. The hombre's hidin' around here somewheres. But we're through. Ain't no use. If it waren't for that hoss of Skeeters—"

"No trace of the fugitive?" the girl asked.

"None," one of the men said with an oath. "'Cept there was a mucker down thataway, locoed from the heat. Sort of hermit, which he said the hellbender had stopped for to give his hoss some water. He acted kind of mysterious like and said he'd guarantee the man would be broughten in daid to Seven Mules afore another day was up. We tried to bully him into tellin' us more, but he wouldn't. We didn't waste no time with him. seein' he was locoed to start with."

"Is that the only trace?" the girl asked.

"It is, but it ain't what you'd call a trace. Just a daft hermit—that's all."

"Where is this daft hermit?" the girl asked.

One of the men pointed southward. "That thar is the Sierra del Aja. Head for it, but cut west when you see a row of mesas. You'll find a river bed runnin' alongside of the mesas. It's dry and shallow. Down toward the mouth you'll find a hut like a Mex's xacalli. That's where we've just trailed from.

"This daft mucker's there, but I advise you to keep your holster flap open when you talk to him, and draw good and quick if he starts anything. I didn't like the looks of his eyes. Like the eyes of them goldfish at Pedro's place.

"But why do you want to be horsin' down this fur into the desert, gal?" an old rider asked. "'Tain't no place for a lady. The cañons is full of renegades and Mexes. Better leave your big brothers catch this hombre!"

The girl had no time for a palaver. She had hesitated only long enough to get that one clew—the "daft hermit"—and with this she left the posse gaping, wheeled her horse, and galloped off toward the purple range which was called the Sierra del Aja.

The found the fishy-eyed mucker, Scoop Hardy, frying his supper in his shack.

He answered her question with an amused grin on his dried-up face: "You want to find the murderer yourself, do you? Wall I reckon you're too late. He's most likely plugged."

"How do you know?" the girl cried frantically. "What do you know about him? You tell me. Don't hedge—the way you've been doing with the others! You tell me straight!"

Scoop Hardy opened his wide pale eyes. "You're shore runnin' a blaze, lady, talkin' thataway. Here you come galavantin' around in the desert all alone and think you kin give orders to every—"

Scoop hesitated. It came over him all of a sudden that this slender, delicate-featured girl was holding a six-gun with its muzzle pointed directly at him.

"Say, who are you, miss, anyway?"

"I'm Skeeter Brodell's sister," she replied. "Perhaps you'll tell me now."

"I shore will!" the little mucker exclaimed readily. "Ef I'd known I was talkin' to a Brodell, I'd told you in the first place: Your man is trapped. That's the answer. And from what I sized him up as when I seen his gray eyes squintin' at me, I figured he'd plug the first man as cornered him.

"Wall, miss, that thar has happened—not so very long ago. I sent a couple of hard lookin' birds down thataway." He pointed to the miniature mesa. "A mile beyond that picacho is a deep gorge almost like a well, which you cain't git in or out except through two bowlders at one end. I staked a whole lot on my idee that this gent you're after is hidin' in thar. I sent two deputies after him, and it's my honest opinion they've either got him by now—daid, of course—or else he's plugged 'em both."

She gathered her reins, pressed her heels into the flanks of her mount. The little horse jumped off for the trail.

The sun had set. When she reached the picacho, and galloped around its granite base, she saw the box cañon which was

like a black crack in the flat breast of the desert. Beyond was a blood red sky. Against this lurid background she saw a horseman galloping his mount at a furious speed toward the south.

Following that horseman was another riderless horse. It was not being led. It was loping along, after the manner of any horse not wishing to be left alone.

There was nothing about those silhouettes of the horseman and the riderless nag loping along that could give the girl a clew to what had happened. There might have been any number of explanations. But again that inexplicable genius of all women who fear for the safety of some one they love, gave her the answer.

An abnormal insight sharpened by those two primal instincts, love and fear, told the Brodell girl that her long and torturing ride was in vain. She feared and was convinced that she had come too late.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAKE-BELIEVE TURNS REAL.

JIM CHILTON had found the box-cañon which the mucker had pointed out to him, and had decided to remain there in hiding until his horse was well rested. He saw, however, at a glance that it was a dangerous place if he were ever cornered there. He ascertained by a short ride over the rocky bed of the cañon that it had only one outlet, unless of course a man abandoned his horse, in which event he could probably negotiate those steep walls.

The walls rose abruptly to the flat floor of the desert above. Side draws were filled with chaparral, and in one of these Chilton tethered his horse. He himself crawled to a bed of sand, using his saddle for a pillow, and from the sheer intensity of his fatigue, fell asleep.

This, of course, was a mistake. Perhaps a desperate criminal would have held out longer. But the mere fact that his conscience was clear enabled Jim Chilton to drop off to sleep as soon as his head rested on that saddle.

He was awakened by the whinnying of his own horse. That sound was like a bugle calling a soldier to battle. Chilton knew perfectly well what it meant. There was another horse near by. Perhaps there were many. One thing at least was certain: Jim Chilton was trapped.

He did not jump to his feet. If he had, he probably would have been killed. Instead he lay without moving, without so much as turning his head.

He opened his eyes and looked about at the thick chaparral, at the stratified layers of red and yellow rock on the cañon walls; thence he glanced through the corners of his eyes at the bowlders of the cañon floor, and the gate, and the white sky beyond.

He was not far from the gate. Purposely he had chosen his hiding place near those two giant bowlders so that he could guard that entrance to his domain. Through the thickly intertwined branches of the mesquite he could see two horses out there, on one of which was a rider.

The fact that both horses were saddled, and one was riderless led Chilton to the correct conclusion that he was in very grave danger. There had, of course, been two men, and one had dismounted, and was crawling about in that chaparral. It gave Chilton the feeling that he was lying in a bed in which there was a spider that he could not catch.

The next evidence of his danger was by no means so hypothetical. It was a plain undeniable fact:

A bullet whizzed through the mesquite screen, slicing the tough roots, ricocheting across a rock slab an arm's length from Chilton's shoulder.

This gave him a pleasant thrill, which excited every nerve in his body. He knew what it was now to be cornered. His life was wanted. They were not going to take him prisoner. They were going to kill him —if they could.

What the girl had said in warning was right. They were not going to give him a chance. It was not a matter of law now, of imprisonment, of trials. It was a plain matter of life or death.

Chilton no longer remained in that sleeping posture. There was no need for it. The chaparral did not protect him; either from

view or from gunfire. He looked about him.

Just beyond the flat rock slab was a depression, hollowed out by some waterfall, now dry, in ages past. With a single twist of his body, Jim rolled over and slid down into this depression. It was an easy movement, deliberate, graceful. He did it as if he had fallen off a log.

Shots spattered all about him just as he had slipped down into this little bowl in the rock. One caught the crown of his sombrero. But it was the only close hit. It felt as if some one had struck him with a dull soft thing like a pillow. He put his hand to his head to see if the skin was cut, but there was no blood.

He was cornered now. There was no doubt about that. It was too dangerous to thrust his head over the rim of that saucer-like rock. He stayed there, flattened down, his belly on the hot granite, while the sun broiled for an interminable hour.

His enemies knew where he was, and they were as afraid to risk his fire as he to risk theirs. They, of course, had plenty of time, and for that matter so did he. The hour stretched on. The sun scorched him. The rim of the rock waved in the heat.

Beyond were the tips of the little mesquite twigs and their dust covered leaves. Beyond that were the red and yellow walls of the cañon, and the narrow verticle strip of white sky.

The afternoon wore on. There was the occasional champing of the horses there by the cañon gate; the lazy drone of a blowfly, the neighing of Chilton's own horse, and finally—the snapping of a mesquite twig.

The sun had slipped down beyond the rim of the sandstone and granite walls. The layers of yellow and red turned to purple, then darkened to one soft monotone. The vertical space of sky at the cañon gate had turned blood red.

It was just after sunset that Chilton had heard that mesquite twig snap. He had been expecting it for hours. His ear had been delicately attuned to it. Every hour of tension had made him more and more alert. How far away that sound really was, he could not tell.

An Indian with an ear attuned to every sound in the forest might have heard it a good deal farther. It was only because of his alertness in the presence of death that this city man could hear it.

He knew what it meant. Some one was crawling nearer to him—or perhaps changing position so as to get him within range.

Chilton himself would not have moved. He firmly intended staying there under cover, until one of his adversaries made an attempt to draw his fire. Again there was the sound of small brush crackling.

The man who had dismounted from his horse appeared intent on getting a shot at the fugitive before darkness came. He likewise seemed intent on keeping under the cover of the mesquite. But the mesquite was dry, the twigs crackled no matter how slowly he dragged himself along. Chilton estimated the exact position of his enemy—the man had crawled a good hundred yards from the mouth of the gate.

The twilight began to deepen rapidly—according to the manner of desert sunsets. If it had been the same degree of dusk in the early morning the chances of a crack shot would have been perfect. But now it was momentarily getting harder.

With the absolute composure of some religious mystic contemplating a certain spot in a crystal, Jim Chilton looked across the rim of his little granite bowl.

Then it happened. A sombrero popped up like a jack-in-the-box out of the mesquite. Chilton had the instantaneous view of a big man looming against the purple background. It was like watching a man through the shutter of a camera. The whole pantomime began and ended in one grotesque movement.

But that second was ample for Chilton to squeeze the trigger of his automatic. The man dropped back into the mesquite partly because he had consciously leaped up and dropped back like a recoiling gun; partly because he had been hit.

His gun had flashed, barked. But Chilton could hear it now clattering to the ground, through the mesquite to the stones underneath.

The next moment was filled with events that Chilton was at first at a loss to under-

stand. He heard a clattering of horses' feet, that grew dimmer, echoing at first through those narrow granite walls at the cañon's mouth, then dwindling away so that the echoes within the cañon were all that remained of their rhythmic sound. His other antagonist was apparently in flight.

The wise thing to do, of course, was for Chilton to remain in that bowl until darkness—for fear that the man he had hit might not be dead. But something happened to prevent this.

Shortly after those horses had galloped away, Chilton heard the hoofbeats of a single horse coming toward the cañon's mouth. What this meant he could not for the life of him determine. Perhaps the rider who had retreated was now returning. Not likely. Perhaps it was another rider, ignorant of the gun-duel that had just taken place. At any rate the chances were a hundred to one that it was another enemy—an enemy who would shoot to kill.

This time Chilton had no intentions of letting that rider enter the cañon. He had been caught asleep before, but now he could hold the cañon gate against any number of horsemen.

He left his rock. One glance at the mesquite patch showed him that his man had fallen, was lying inert. If he were dead—

A pang went through calm, complacent Jim Chilton. *If that man were dead!*

What did this mean? Chilton had been playing at being a murderer. He had had a lot of fun. But now what had happened! Was he really a murderer? Was this masquerade of his turning into ghastly reality?

He did not go to the cañon gate. The rider came plunging on. It made no difference to Chilton. There was something of infinitely greater importance than to carry on that mockery—that mockery which had already become a hideous truth.

He went instead to the man he had shot. He held him up, so that the arms hung limply forward, the head hung down. He felt his heart, and then let him down again upon the bed of mesquite, face downward as he had fallen.

He was dead.

The rider came galloping across the bed of the cañon from the gate toward Jim Chilton. Intuitively the latter gripped his gun, but he did not fire. In the twilight he saw the figure of a girl in the saddle. Her mount, drawn up sharp, reared, coming to its haunches in the sand.

The girl saw the body of the man Jim Chilton had killed.

She gave vent to a desperate soft cry: "Then I'm too late!"

Chilton saw the paper in her hand, which she was holding out toward him. It was a tragic gesture—as if she were pushing some abhorrent thing away from her, begging him mutely to take it.

He read the words:

> David Morduant a suicide. Your sacrifice is futile.

"Yes. It is too late," he said with a calm sadness in his voice. "You can see what's happened. I was playing at being a fugitive when you saw me last. I am in earnest now. I have killed this man."

She turned to the body—perhaps with a desperate hope that there was yet a flicker of life. She knelt down, took the inert shoulders, and turned the man over so that his face stared upward. She looked at it earnestly, brushing away a lock of hair that had fallen down across the forehead and cheek. The light was dim. She bent down closer.

Again she emitted a cry—a strange one now, which Jim Chilton could not understand. It was still soft, intense—that cry—with a ring of deep, inscrutable passion.

Jim Chilton felt a pang shoot through him. What was it that brought that strange cry from the throat of the girl.

"Good God!" he cried audibly, "have I killed one of her brothers?"

She turned to him and threw herself toward him. He had the momentary conviction that she was going to tear him to pieces like a puma leaping upon its prey. But there was something else in that passionate gesture of hers.

She was not clawing his eyes out. She was clinging to him with her strong slender arms about his neck. She was pressing his head down to her, clinging to his lips.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Rope Enough

By WALTER A. SINCLAIR

AD HICKEY had been murdered—there had been no accident about it.

Whispers carrying this sinister news swept among the rodeo hands and officials with radio speed shortly after the bronk rider had been carried from the arena to the first aid station under the stand. Ad was dead when the doctors examined the battered body. If any spark of life still flickered when the other hands picked him up, it had gone out before the professional examination began. Then had followed the discovery of the slashed girth.

Hickey had been a slender, wiry, dark-faced man with a lean, long, cold face. He had had a way of pulling his eyebrows down over his piercing eyes which was extremely disconcerting to any one who drew his displeasure. He had been a ranch foreman until he discovered that his superior riding ability qualified him for a wider field and better money as a top hand bronk rider at rodeos. He had gone into this in a cool, systematic manner which carried him along regularly to good money.

At the present cowboy contest first honors for the bronk riding had narrowed down on the fourth and final day to Ad Hickey and Harvey Coleman. Every other contestant had had to grab leather, shake hands with grandma or even eat gravel. But Ad Hickey, the State's pride, and Harve Coleman, who came from Oklahoma, had qualified each time out by such well-matched riding that the judges averaged them equally. Their final rides were to decide it. And on his final ride Ad Hickey had been killed—murdered.

Packed grandstands and infield had witnessed the tragedy. Thirty thousand persons, ranchers from three States, local townspeople, and tourists crowded the fair grounds. "Old Times" was an annual event which the town, the State and the railroads joined to make successful. Top hands and hopeful contenders from ten Western States were entered in the various events. The betting was heavy on the bronk-riding championship. Wagers had mounted up among contestants and spectators. Excite-

ment was at fever pitch when the bronk riding was under way.

Ad Hickey had drawn Thunderbolt, an outlaw bronk with a reputation as a killer. He had knocked off rodeo riders at Ardmore and Cheyenne, but this record did not hold back any contestant who drew him. Thunderbolt could be depended upon to give a man a ride which would put him in the money—if the rider stayed on.

Thunderbolt had been ugly, but restrained in the chute. The bronk that wears himself out trying to kill his rider on the wooden bars before the gate opens frequently loses so much steam that he fails to do his best in the critical thirty or forty seconds right after he is sent into the arena. Rodeo riders said that old Thunderbolt studied his riders and remembered their weak points. If a certatin trick had bucked a man two or three years previously, the bronk remembered that trick and tried it on the man again. Such, at least, was the tradition.

Hickey had lowered himself carefully, lightly, to the saddle and had pulled the cinch. He had one hand on the top bar of the gate, ready to raise himself free of the saddle at the first murderous move in the chute. He looked across the gate out at the mounted judges waiting in the arena, and signaled to them that he was ready.

Below the level of the top bar on the eight-foot gate stood the arena director and a small group of contestants. Friendly rivals, a few always peered between the bars to make sure that every condition had been observed and no undue advantage taken. Harve Coleman was among those who stared at the taped spurs and drawn cinch.

"Here's where I win," Hickey had remarked, staring coolly down at Harve. The gaze was returned levelly. Cold fire leaped between eyes.

"You'll never live to see the day you can beat—" began Harve in matter-of-fact tone. At that instant Tip Bagley, the big Cherokee chute tender, swung open the gate.

Hickey swung his hat with his right hand and with his left jerked the hackamore to swing Thunderbolt's head out of the chute. At the same instant he brought his spurs down with a galvanizing scratch. The outlaw swung from his sidewise position in the chute and, tensing all his muscles, leaped out. In the arena, with his camera pointed at the opened chute, stood "Silent" Knight, the cowboy photographer who covered all rodeos. His shutter clicked a second too soon to catch the day's sensation.

Twitching and pitching, the outlaw leaped into the air, all fours off. By a muscular trick he appeared to expand, to bulge out suddenly as though inflated. There followed a sharp snap. Simultaneously the girth burst in two, the saddle shot suddenly down the bronk's off side, and Ad Hickey, who had been doing anything but ride safe, hit the ground beneath those stamping hoofs. The mankiller struck with the swiftness of his namesake. And with the same deadliness.

It happened so fast that Knight did not have time to adjust his film and snap again before it was over. Two crashing, triphammer blows and the bronk was off his victim.

Judges and pick-up men were spurring to the rescue. Some of the contestants on foot were daring those flailing hoofs and striking with hats or ropes to drive off the killer. A pick-up man roped and dragged Thunderbolt from the arena. A half dozen contestants surrounded the battered form on the ground. Under cover of the music which had continued, they carried out all that remained of Hickey, to the first aid room. The arena director ordered the next rider rushed out. The rodeo must go on.

For the most part the crowd was calm. These Western spectators often had seen cowboy contestants knocked cold and carried out, only to reappear within an hour or so. It was hard work to injure a rodeo hand enough to keep him down. There had been a few who were near enough to see those killing kicks. But the music and continuance of the contest reassured the crowd.

Harvey Coleman, who had remained at the chute door, was one of those who had seen all. He was among the first to drive off Thunderbolt and to pick up Ad. The little group had reached the arena gate when

the arena director called Harve to prepare immediately for his ride. Harve seemed reluctant to yield his share of the sad burden, when the girl who had sprung after him took his place.

"Go, Harve. And don't let this shake your nerve," she urged, shouldering Coleman away from his place and substituting herself. The bronk rider hesitated, a prey to conflicting emotions.

"Hurry up, Harve," shouted the arena boss, excitedly.

"All right, Wyo," murmured Harvey to the girl. Her anxious, dark eyes had searched his face intently. And he had met the scrutiny.

"Good luck," whispered Wyo Stack—Wyoming it had been at baptism. She forced a smile to her serious lips, but the worried look still lay in her eyes.

Her smile was almost maternal in its protecting, encouraging quality, although she was but little past twenty-one. It was not that she seemed older than her years—the look was largely in her all-seeing eyes. Dark and deep, they were. Eyes that searched souls.

Harve ran to the chute where B'ar Crick was penned tightly awaiting him. Cool though he was and had to be to remain a bronk rider, he felt a tautness of nerves. The sight of Hickey being smashed had left its shock, no matter how great his control. But Coleman betrayed no sign of it two minutes later when B'ar Crick pinwheeled out of the chute and then changed abruptly to sun-fishing. The ride was packed with thrills, but Harve made it successfully. At the judges' whistle he was still moving in easy coördination with his bucking bronk.

About the moment the cheering crowd acclaimed Harve's ride, the doctor who had been hurried to the tiny first aid room briefly said:

"He's dead. Skull crushed."

Hovering near, Wyo Stack heard the verdict and hastened back to the arena. She arrived just in time to see a group of rodeo hands surrounding the arena director and one of the chute handlers who had been examining the committee saddle which Thunderbolt had thrown off. The man was pointing to the severed girth.

"It was cut, shore enough," several were exclaiming as Wyo edged into the group. They were excited, but managed to keep down their voices. The spectators must not be alarmed. The rodeo must go on.

"You can see plain whar it was slashed and weakened," this handler was pointing out. "The outside was cut clean, while the inner side is torn."

"Must 'a' cut just enough to weaken it so's the first big buck would bu'st it," deduced another hand, familiar with straps.

"Stroll around quiet and locate the sheriff," ordered the arena director. Fancy roping was in progress and attention was centered on the performers. "Ask him if he minds stepping here."

It was no easy task to locate the official who had been moving through the crowd keeping an eye out for unwelcome visitors. The rodeo was over before the sheriff was found and brought around to the chutes. He examined the slashed girth strap, heard the director's suspicions, and then started circulating among the contestants, interrogating them. He was a reliable peace officer, although hardly a detective.

From the moment she heard the assertion that Ad Hickey had been murdered, Wyo Stack's mind was busy with the problem. Any one watching her would have noted a quiet young woman with dark hair and searching dark eyes. Those eyes would have held the observer where otherwise he might have itemized the trim figure displayed in blue silk blouse, whipcord breeches and tan boots. In spite of the broad brim of her big white hat and in spite of the fluff of black hair coiffed over her forehead, the intelligent breadth of brow could not be hidden entirely.

Wyo's face was alive with character and poise. Hers was an analyzing mind, and it had set to work immediately on the problem of who killed Ad Hickey.

If heredity counted for anything, Wyo was well endowed to study this case. Her father, Dan Stack, had been a keen trailer of man and game in his more active young manhood. Wyo had had a college training which equipped her to take mental short-cuts, if nothing else. On the Stack ranch she had learned to ride, rope and shoot.

Particularly she had learned to ride bucking horses, she seemed to have a natural gift for that, and the fascination of it had led her into the rodeos. Successfully forking a bucker is first class training in mental alertness.

There is that necessity of outsmarting the horse which sharpens and speeds up the wits. One has to be able to think with lightning speed and think correctly to anticipate a bucker's next move. Wyo had proved an agile and accurate guesser. So much so that she never had been injured seriously. She specialized on bronk riding, although she could trick ride and rope with the best of them.

From the moment she heard the hint of murder, her mind had been racing. She had more than common interest, more than the fact that a fellow contestant had been killed through foul play. Ad Hickey had professed love for her, had tried to woo her. Wyo had been flattered, if not won. She had liked Ad in a friendly way, but there was not the big response of the heart which told her to encourage him. She had let him down so easily that Hickey had not realized it was final. He had vowed he would persist until she saw reason. And now he was murdered.

Who killed him? Why?

Wyo looked eagerly around for Harve Coleman. He had appeared to be preoccupied, even worried, after finishing his ride. He lingered around at the edge of the arena, speculatively eying the judges. Although practically certain that they would announce in his favor, he had to wait until the last event was concluded before he knew for sure. He certainly had something on his mind. During the interval of waiting he disappeared in the direction of the office where there was a telephone.

The fact that he did not join her after doing his ride hurt Wyo a trifle. This was not like her devoted young man. Harve Coleman had made no secret of his love for her, and Wyo had responded gladly to the vibrations he had started. She had been a trifle disappointed at the jealous manner with which he had viewed Ad Hickey's attentions to her. Still even that had thrilled her. Wyo was a woman.

Turning the known facts over in her mind on this afternoon following the tragedy. Wyo wondered what an outsider would suspect if he knew that the two men had been rivals for her favor. She had known Harve only a few months, yet it seemed as though she had known him for years. They had met at a rodeo in another State, and something within her had gone out to this cowboy cavalier.

Harve was tall and tanned, slow-spoken yet quick in movement. His light hair and blue eyes contrasted oddly with his tanned face and hands. He talked with a soft Southwestern drawl, but with no dialect, and he did not talk much. While he was not exactly secretive, Wyo did not know a great deal specifically about Harve. She had had to take him at face value, and she had done that gladly.

After the announcements had been made and Harve had reappeared long enough to take his bows with the winners, he walked over and joined her. Wyo was studying him intently, and smiled inquiringly.

"Where will you be after to-day?" he asked abruptly. Wyo answered that she would leave for home the following morning. Coleman continued in his preoccupied manner: "I'll see you later. I've got to get away in a hurry."

With that he was gone. Wyo stared thoughtfully after him, too interested to be hurt by his terse good-by. She knew Harve well enough to realize that that was his normal manner. If she accepted him, she would have to expect this brevity of speech. Harve seemed to assume that she had plenty of understanding, and to leave much to that comprehension. Still Wyo wondered where he was going and why he was in such a hurry.

She had examined the slashed saddle girth, and now, with the crowd gone, she went behind the chute from which Ad Hickey rode to his death. Back there she studied the situation. There were six chutes with gates opening upon the arena. Or rather, it was one long chute divided by sliding cross gates into six compartments or stalls.

A runway led to them from the rear, bisecting the row of chutes like the stem of

a capital T. Horses and steers were driven through the runway and then turned, right and left, into the chutes. The back of the chute was a rail fence. Protected by the stout six-inch rails the handlers stood behind this fence driving the stock along inside the chute, sliding gates shut after each until there were three animals on either side of the runway. A person could reach through the spaces between the rails of the back fence and could slash a girth just as the bronk was turned out.

Wyo had noted that Thunderbolt had stood with his right side to the arena and had gone out right side first. The girth had been cut on his left side. Wyo stood behind that chute and went through the motions, reconstructing the crime as well as she could. A man of ordinary height could keep his face behind one of those horizontal rails and thus hide his features from the horseman in the chute. A rider intent on clearing the arena gate would not look to the other side where he had reason to suppose there would be only some friendly stock handler, if any one.

"This was Ad's chute," announced a voice on the arena side of the chutes. One of the rodeo hands was speaking.

"You say that this Coleman said something to Hickey about not having long to live?" demanded a heavy, authoritative voice.

"Why, I cain't jest remember exactly, sheriff," replied the first voice, worriedly. "As I remember it, Harve says: 'You'll never live to beat me,' or some sich. Harve stood right here a looking up at Ad. I didn't put no importance on it. Don't now. Just brag."

"Then, standing right beside the gate, he could have slashed the girth as the bucker passed him?" demanded the sheriff. "If he was quick enough and had the nerve to stand in close while everybody else was looking up at Hickey?"

"He'd have to be almighty quick, proving the hand can deceive the eye," remarked the cowboy. "And why should he?"

"Haven't said he did," replied the sheriff. "I'm looking for a motive, and how it was done and who done it. From what a few boys have told me, Ad and Harve were not only neck-and-neck for the big purse, but also they were both rivals for one of the girls here."

Wyo shrank against the thick upright post and remained concealed until the sheriff and the contestant had strolled off to interview others.

Harvey was under suspicion! It was absurd to think that he would kill for a thousand dollars, the main purse. Or for rivalry in love. Wyo was unfaltering in her belief that Harvey would fight openly and fairly for her favor. Yet—why had he hurried away? She must help him.

In the late daylight of the summer afternoon she saw Dad Parks crossing the arena. He was a rodeo fixture although he attended as a spectator, a critical observer. He had been an old-time scout who had trailed Indians with Miles in Dakota and with Wood in Arizona. When the rodeo season began, he emerged from the obscurity into which he had withdrawn, and followed the cowboy contests around the West. This annual jaunt gave him a cut-back to the past which seemed to rejuvenate the old boy. His get-up, which included an ancient buckskin coat with leather fringe, smacked of Wild West shows, but Dad Parks was a genuine trailer, even now.

Wyo called him over and asked him to examine the ground around Thunderbolt's chute. She watched with interest while this representative of the Old West bent his craggy brows, stooped and scanned the earth. As he did so, some of the old time fire glowed in his leathery face.

"Plenty boot prints here and one set o' shoe prints," he announced triumphantly. "Easy to tell 'em from boots, 'count of the boots having high, small heels. Purty fresh signs, I'd say."

Wyo thrilled. Here was confirmation of her theory that some one other than a rodeo contestant had done the slashing. Looking through the bars, she saw "Silent" Knight carrying his camera across the arena on his way to the office. Dragging the old scout along with her, she joined the cowboy photographer. Walking beside him, she asked if he had not taken a snapshot just as Ad Hickey left the chute.

"Yes, dawgawn it—a second or so too soon," drawled Knight in professional complaint. "Otherwise I might have caught a shot of him as he went over. The newspapers will all want that."

"I wish you'd rush an enlargement of the picture you made, for me," she requested. "Throw it up as big as you can without destroying the details and likenesses. It's important that I get it to-night."

Knight promised to make her a print before he retired and to deliver it at her hotel. Wyo then went on into the office to collect the day money she had won in the girls' bronk riding that afternoon. She had to wait a few minutes until the rodeo manager and his arena director finished their conference. She had concluded her business when the sheriff entered. He was a short, stocky man of fifty, with a broad, good natured face ornamented by a large mustache and also, at that moment, by a worried look.

"Where's this Harve Coleman?" he demanded.

"He collected his money and left," answered the manager. "First one to be paid off, and he wanted it in cash, too. Seemed to be in a hurry to get away, and he had called a car, I reckon. Seemed awful anxious about something and wanted to get away in an awful rush. Why?"

"I wanted to ask him about this killing," explained the sheriff. "There's some matters he'll have to explain."

The official hurriedly turned to his two deputies who had followed in, and ordered them to take his car and start immediately in pursuit of Harvey Coleman. The orders were to bring him back.

"You don't suspect Harve!" ejaculated the manager.

"Why did he run away?" countered the sheriff. "He was Hickey's main rival for the purse, and also for a girl—"

"Ssh!" interrupted the manager. "This is Wyo Stack herself."

"Your suspicions are absurd," cried Wyo, her face flaming but her eyes steady. "The purse was not big enough to tempt a man like Harvey to murder."

"Murder's been done for less—and maybe he thought it would only put Hickey out of the running," insisted the sheriff. "And you, if you'll pardon my saying so, are a prize valuable enough for—"

Wyo stamped impatiently, so the sheriff ended lamely:

"Why did he light out? Plenty boys heard him tell Hickey that he'd never live to win."

"Just a phrase, unfortunate in this case," defended Wyo. "Harve was on the right side of the bronk, too, and the girth was cut on the left side. Do any of the stock handlers wear shoes instead of boots?"

This last was directed at the two rodeo officials. They sent out for the men who handled the stock back of the chutes. Five cowboys hurried in. Some wore overalls, but all wore high hats and boots with high heels. One of them carried a new pair of overalls over one arm.

"Found these out in the runway," he explained. "Any one report losing a pair?"

No one had. Wyo seized the overalls and examined them. They were brand new. As she inspected them closely, she made a discovery. The long, narrow patch pocket designed to hold a carpenter's rule or a screw-driver was hanging loosely. Along one seam it had been cut as cleanly as if sheared by a keen edge. A sharp knife, hastily pulled from that long, slender pocket, might have cut just that way.

"Harvey was in the arena and the man who cut the girth was back of the chutes," asserted Wyo, displaying the cut pocket. "There are plenty of ways to get from the grandstand to back of the chutes. With only five boys, all busy keeping the stock moving along the runway from the corral, it would be easy for a man wearing overalls and a cowboy hat to walk right in back there without attracting particular attention. These handlers come from different places, don't they? Not all one outfit, and they don't know every one who wanders in back of the chutes. You've had carpenters running in and out back there repairing when a bronk kicks out a rail. A bold man in overalls could get right around there unobserved. The fence shields him from being seen plainly from the arena. Every one was looking up at Ad and the bronk. These overalls are the only clew."

"You say Coleman was on the right side of the gate, but others say he was on the left and some can't remember, so there you are," submitted the sheriff. "The girth might have been cut before then."

"It wouldn't have been cut before Ad had mounted," argued Wyo. "Otherwise there would be the probability of the girth breaking when he cinched it tightly. That would give the thing away in time for Ad to get another saddle. It was done at the last moment by some one reaching through the bars right behind Ad's left leg."

"Just the same I'm going to question Coleman," persisted the sheriff. "If you find a man to fit those overalls, let me know."

He left with this half-mocking remark. Wyo turned to the rodeo manager, asking where Hickey came from and with whom he had had trouble.

I've asked boys who've known him since he entered rodeos two years ago, and nary one remembers him having any trouble," replied the official, adding reluctantly: "Except with Harve, over you."

"They had trouble about me?" gasped Wyo, dismayed.

"Not a real out-and-out quarrel," explained the manager. "Last night Ad told Harve rather cold, to keep away from you."

"What did Harvey do or say?"

"Harve just laughed, kind of dangerous-like, to himse'f," continued the manager. "There wasn't any real ruckus. Just strained relations, so to speak. Looked at one another mighty cold. Then Ad said something about waiting until the rodeo was over."

"You didn't tell the sheriff that?"

"Somebody'd already told him, so I confirmed it when he put it to me. About where Ad was from, I think his entry letter tells."

From his files the manager produced Ad's letter accompanying his entry for the contest. It was written on the letterhead of a ranch near Cincho, two hundred miles distant. Wyo noted that the ranch had a telephone address. She hurried to her hotel and put in a long distance call to this ranch for an hour later. Then she started on a round of the local stores which sold overalls. She induced Dad Parks to canvass some of the stores while she went to the others. He agreed eagerly.

Wyo chose correctly to start on stores nearest the hotels. She also narrowed down her search by first asking each dealer interviewed if he carried that particular brand. At the third store she visited, the dealer remembered having sold a pair of overalls early that afternoon. Upon examining the overalls Wyo carried, he declared they were the pair he had sold. His attention had been fixed by his having wondered why any one wanted overalls on a day when the town was in gala attire. Moreover, the customer had not looked like an overalls man. True, he had on a big hat, but he wore tailored clothes and his hands were soft and white.

The storekeeper was sure he could identify the customer if he saw him again. Sort of pale-faced fellow with dark shadows under his eyes, but not sickly. He was robust enough. He had black hair, heavy eyebrows, sharp black eyes, a small black mustache, and wore a gray suit and hat.

"Sounds like it might have been a gambler," mused Wyo.

"Just what I thought!" exclaimed the dealer.

Could it be that some gambler or ring of gamblers betting heavily on the outcome of the contest had made certain that Hickey, the favorite, should lose?

Wyo grasped at this possibility. Swiftly making her decision, she offered to reimburse the storekeeper for any sales he lost, if he would close at once and accompany her on a round of the gathering places in search of his mysterious customer. She wanted the storekeeper to point out the man if they saw him. Just as she had enlisted Dad Parks, Silent Knight, and the rodeo manager to aid in her search, Wyo also won over Harman, the storekeeper. He eagerly agreed to help, and scorned to take any remuneration, saying he had intended to close soon anyway.

After he had agreed to join her within half an hour, Wyo hurried away to attend to her long distance call. Luck was with her, for she got the ranch manager on the

wire, and he proved to be a wide-awake citizen. In response to her inquiries, the rancher after brief reflection, replied:

"Ad wasn't the sort that the other boys started trouble with. But I recall, kind of faintly, that back about three years ago he showed up a crooked gambler down at Cincho. Grabbed his hand just as this fellow was slipping in a marked deck. The boys ran the crook out of town. We heard that the news followed him to the next place he tried, and got him into some sort of gun or knife scrape that sent him up for a year or so. Fellow's name was Crampton or Cranston, as I recall it. That's the only trouble I ever heard of. Hope this helps you."

It certainly did, Wyo assured him gratefully before hanging up. With that clew, she started on a feverish circuit of the hotels where the visiting cowboys and tourists congregated. With her went Harman, the storekeeper, almost as eager as she. While Wyo inquired at hotel desks, Harman prowled through lobbies, corridors and barrooms.

Old Dad Parks, who had conscientiously canvassed the stores assigned to him, reported that none had sold any overalls that day. This strengthened Wyo's belief that she had struck the right place at Harman's. She urged the old trailer to dine and rest, but the thrill of the man hunt had been roused in him after many years. Dad was having the time of his life; somebody appreciated his gifts and didn't consider him a fossilized relic of the pioneer West. He insisted on joining Wyo.

This oddly-assorted trio again started around to investigate hotel registrations. Within the hour, Wyo learned from an obliging room clerk that there was a Crampton registered at his hostelry. He had been there during the entire "Old Times" rodeo, but this clerk had seen little of him. At the moment Crampton was not in his room, which was 208 on the second floor. The clerk indicated the key in the 208 box.

Wyo requested him not to mention her inquiry, to which he agreed. Then she slipped up to the second floor where she tipped a chambermaid liberally to put a paper-wrapped package in Room 208.

"Put it on the bed where it can't be missed," she instructed. "It's a surprise, so don't say anything about it."

Returning to the lobby, she seated herself comfortably where she could watch the letter-and-key pigeonholes back of the clerk's desk. If the key was taken from Box 208, she could see it immediately. As she watched, Harman bustled up excitedly and whispered:

"He's in the barroom! Shall I get the sheriff?"

He nodded mysteriously toward the door leading to a section which still maintained the semblance of a barroom. Hilarious talk and laughter from beyond the door suggested that the resemblance was not confined entirely to the fixtures.

"No," ruled Wyo. "We haven't anything on him. Let's wait. If he's guilty, he will tangle himself if we give him rope enough."

Harman was visibly disappointed at this failure to give him an exciting scene, but Wyo sat firm. Occasionally passing acquaintances bowed or spoke to the girl bronk rider. She returned their greetings pleasantly enough but did not encourage any one to stop. She did not wish to divide her attention. Nevertheless, Clem Towers, one of the ropers, insisted on halting to chat for a minute. He said he was hitting the hay immediately because he had put in an early call. He had driven over to the rodeo in his battered but sturdy little old car, and he was going to start back before dawn on an all-day drive home. Wyo bade him farewell until they met at another rodeo, and Clem went on upstairs with his key. The night dragged on.

The watching trio grew weary and Harman had become restive, when finally the barroom door swung open before an increasing gale of hilarity.

"There he is," whispered the storekeeper, turning his back on the knot of seven men who straggled out. "The third man, in gray."

Wyo had no difficulty in picking out the man he meant. As Harman had said, this man's big cowboy hat did not make him a cowboy. He wore a well-tailored gray suit, and he did not have the bronzed,

breezy and healthy appearance of the real cow-puncher. He was pale, but not sickly. His pallor suggested sun-dodging night life —and possibly prison, and was emphasized by his inky black brows and small mustache. He had darting black eyes, heavily undershadowed. His quick, sharp glance swept the trio of watchers and then passed on. They had not been conspicuous in a lobby fairly well-filled with people.

The hilarious seven straggled on up the stairs. Disjointed words and sentences advertised the fact that they were going to start a poker game in somebody's room. The man in gray had fallen back for a moment to argue with a companion dressed in brown who had beckoned him over to one side of the lobby not far from Wyo.

She was certain that they were both pretending the hilarity which was genuine with their companions. Without appearing to look at them, Wyo sauntered toward the news-stand. She passed near enough to hear the brown-clad man, with the look of yielding an argument, say:

" All right. Until sun-up. No later."

They followed the others upstairs. The hotel clerk was beckoning and when Wyo went over to his desk, he whispered:

" Didn't you want Crampton? That fellow in gray was him."

She gestured for secrecy, and the clerk nodded. Crampton had not called for his key, he would not be going to his room. Then began the long vigil. About twelve thirty Harman excused himself and left, sadly disappointed at not seeing the conclusion. Old Dad Parks was made of sterner pioneer stuff. In his active younger years he had known nights when his life depended on his keeping awake. He whiled away the hours with anecdotes of those days. Wyo listened with only part of her mind. The other half was mulling the problem:

" Why did Harvey Coleman run away at this time?"

For a time there was plenty of company. Other groups sat or stood around the lobby, talking. This was the last night of " Old Times," and the acquaintances who met only on such occasions were staying up late. Tourists, cowboys and rodeo hands were celebrating before the getaway on the morrow. By two o'clock, however, the lobby was clear of all save Wyo and her old trailer. The dead hours of the night began to prove trying. In spite of the lack of excitement, Wyo managed to keep awake, but for Dad Parks the big night was beginning to wear thin.

Outside the world was in blackness when at three thirty Clem Towers descended to the lobby, yawning loudly. He carried his topcoat, hand luggage and his ropes, and he was plainly startled to see Wyo still up. He politely refrained from questions, and yawned that he was going to get some black coffee and start shortly at first gray of day.

He would go and wake up the old bus in the alley, Clem mumbled, and then get his Java. Wyo hardly listened to him, for noisy footsteps and voices proclaimed that the poker game had broken up. Crampton and his companion in brown appeared, looking satisfied and stuffing their pockets. While his companion went outside, the man in gray paid his bill, took his room key and went upstairs.

" Run outside and watch the second floor window, on that side, where the light goes on," ordered Wyo swiftly. " If he's got a guilty conscience, he may try to slide down the fire escape rope in his room. If he does, you signal with that old cannon you pack. Quick now!"

Without waiting, she skipped softly up the stairs to the second floor. Light, shining through the transom, guided her to Room 208. Tiptoeing noiselessly to that door, she hesitated a moment outside. As she did so, the night was startled by the bang of a revolver. Dad Parks was signaling. The bird was escaping!

The girl turned the door-knob and pushed. The door was locked. Against it she threw her weight, but it resisted. A second time she hurled her shoulder against the door. As she did so, the lock was turned, and the door snatched open. Unprepared for this, Wyo plunged ahead violently. From behind, a heavy blow crashed down on her head. Stunned, she fell.

When consciousness returned, Wyo staggered weakly to her feet. Crampton had

gone. On the bed lay the paper parcel opened, revealing the overalls discarded at the rodeo. The silent accusation had stampeded the suspect.

Over the window sill, out of the dark, crept a pair of gripping hands. Wyo started back at the sight, but an instant later Dad Parks' worried face appeared. The old Indian trailer had laboriously climbed the old-fashioned rope fire escape which dangled out of the window. He had not remained below to stop the fugitive.

As Dad started to explain that he had climbed after becoming alarmed when she did not signal, Wyo interrupted. How long had it been since he fired? Four or five minutes, he estimated. Leaving him to stare after her the girl bounded down the stairs to the street. Clem was turning over his engine.

Yes, another car had rushed off a few minutes sooner, he gasped in answer to her sharp question. A fellow in brown had been tuning up leisurely when another man jumped in and told him to step on it.

" Quick, Clem! We must catch them," urged Wyo, leaping in beside him. " For Ad Hickey's sake. For the sake of Harvey Coleman and all the rodeo folks. Step on it!"

Clem stepped on it. He started off before she had finished the words, and he shot into high as they swooped down the deserted street. In the East the solid inky black was thinning, shading into gray. Through summer's early morning raced the sturdy little, battered old car, picking up speed in an astonishing manner, considering its appearance.

" They headed this way. Probably hitting for the State line," shouted Clem when Wyo had told him hastily the reason of their chase. The road they were traveling was bisected by the State line some twenty miles ahead. Once across, the fugitive would defy capture.

Silvery outriders of day's golden host split the solid black sky during the first half-hour of pursuit. Wyo, straining forward, cried aloud as her ears caught the faint " putt-putt " of a racing motor.

" There they are!" she cried ten minutes later as they topped a rise and saw, some distance ahead, the pursued car. Turning, a bit dismayed at a thought, she gasped: " Clem, I haven't a gun—have you got one?"

The trick roper shook his head although he never slackened his furious drive ahead. They had right with them, and the law behind them. And the rodeo attracts daring men and women.

Foot by foot Clem's old boat pulled up on the other car. The man in gray looked back repeatedly to note their steady approach. He shouted to the brown-clad motorist and pointed, first at the pursuers and then at some signs flanking the road a short distance ahead.

" The State line!" groaned Clem. " We can't head 'em off. They aren't heeled, either, or at least don't want to add shooting or they would have by this time. If we only had a gun!"

His gaze was on the car ahead and the State line signs a hundred yards beyond. Wyo was burrowing feverishly in his luggage at her feet. Suddenly her right arm whirled swiftly in a flashing circle and then shot swiftly forward. The first gleams of sunrise high-lighted the writhing, living white streak which whipped out and spanned the twelve foot gap between the two cars.

" Brakes!" she cried, bracing herself as the loop of Clem's rope snapped around Crampton's shoulders. While the pursued car raced across the State line, the tightened lasso bu'sted Crampton violently to the ground—on the near side of the boundary.

His companion fled on without pausing to help. This left Wyo and Clem free to tie up the stunned man unmolested. With their trussed-up prisoner, they drove back in the beauty of early morning. Before routing out the sheriff, they stopped at Wyo's hotel where she found a telegram and a large flat envelope awaiting her.

" Here's the man who caused Ad Hickey's death," charged Wyo, when the heavy-eyed sheriff had been called into his office. " He did it purposely. He's a card sharp that Ad drove out of Cincho three years ago. He cut the girth for revenge and to surething his bets. He bought the overalls that

were left in the runway. I had them slipped back into his room and when he found them there his guilty conscience stampeded him. Tried to get out of the State. We gave him rope enough."

"That don't prove anything," growled Crampton, who had listened attentively. "I did bat her when she bu'sted into my room like that in the middle of the night. Thought it was somebody gunning for the roll I won. When I saw it was a girl, I did get panicky and skip out. Admitting I had trouble with Hickey, that proves nothing. That was years ago. As for those overalls, I bought them to protect my suit while working on the car, and they were stolen from the car. I can get witnesses that I was in the grandstand during the bronk riding, so how could I cut the girth? I wasn't near the chutes, and you can't prove differently."

"Can't I? Look at this," triumphantly cried Wyo, whipping from the big envelope a photographic enlargement. Her finger indicated a detail. "Look close, sheriff. Knight the photographer snapped this as Ad rode out. There, peering between the bars at the back of the chute is—this man!"

"But why did Harve run away?" puzzled the sheriff, after Crampton had been handcuffed.

Wyo handed him her telegram, which announced:

> Arrived here with prize money just in time to save my options on proved oil land. Already have big offer. Want to see you first.
> HARVEY.

THE END

WHY?

WHY should I say the world is gray
Because it's gray to me?
There's some who think it's bright and pink,
As rosy as can be.

Why should I gloom when blossoms bloom
For others that I know?
Have I the right to scorn and spite
The whole blamed flower show?

What if I have no friend to lend
A hand across the space?
That doesn't mean this earthly green
Is not a friendly place.

Do blind men doubt a sky's about
Because its blue seems black?
Do deaf men sneer at those who hear
The thunder rolling back?

Must I confess that happiness
Has passed the whole world by,
Because it shuns, of all the ones,
This little one called I?

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

Dinner for Cynthia

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Regular People," "A Noise in Newboro," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I AND II

CYNTHIA BLAIR and her cousin, Nora, who share an apartment, are nearly out of funds and are too proud to ask aid of their wealthy uncle, who disapproves of their choice of artistic careers. Cynthia's fiancé cancels a dinner engagement with her on the very evening that a hearty meal would have been most welcome to her. Meanwhile, the mother of Neville Ronalds believes that a Miss Blair has designs on her son's millions, through marriage. Cynthia gets the letter meant for her cousin and decides to call at the Ronalds home on a pretext, simply to get invited to dinner. Neville's dominating grandmother is so greatly impressed with Cynthia's unexpected refinement that she absolutely refuses to let the girl depart, even hiding a valuable pin in her handkerchief and asking the servants to search the girl. The servants believe that Cynthia is a crook. The peculiar situation she finds herself in forces Cynthia to tell her sweetheart that she is engaged to Neville Ronalds. Forced by the eccentric grandmother to spend the night in the Ronalds' home, she tries to telephone from the hall, is caught snooping about by the suspicious maid, who thinks she is trying to steal the silverware, and is locked in her room for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

SUCCOR!

FROM the rear passage floated back a tiny sound, the merest ghost of a thin, vindictive laugh. A board creaked. Seconds, and there was the suggestion of a door closing and after that, complete silence.

In the great, luxurious bed, Cynthia Blair was sitting up now, her gentle bosom heaving quite emotionally, her lovely eyes flashing fire. Really, you know, even in an outrageous household like this one, there are outrages a trifle too great for endurance; and this thing of Graves's walking off with Cynthia's very clothes most emphatically came into that class and—

From just below, there floated up the grate of a moving chair.

Following this there came what, to a

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 18.

total stranger, might have seemed the rumble of distant thunder, a sound however which Cynthia identified at once as originating in Mrs. Stone's deep chest. Unquestionably, that lady had been roused from her rest and was now voicing a few comments, to herself or to some one else.

So, quite suddenly, Cynthia Blair stretched out again in the great, luxurious bed. Ignoring the questions of right and wrong, of the justified and the unjustified, even setting aside the matter of ordinary common sense and reasoning, there was no denying that Mrs. Stone made her own impression on one!

And—and—well, actually, one couldn't blame Graves so very much, after all. Graves had acted according to her own lights and on her own information and beliefs, and probably solely in the interest of her employer; she couldn't well have developed a personal spite against Cynthia in this short time, unless Cynthia's suggestion that Graves herself had palmed the lace-pin had soured an already souring nature.

And perhaps one couldn't even blame the remarkable Mrs. Stone so very much. A certain hazy understanding of that unusual character had come to Cynthia now. Decidedly, she was a woman of one idea; she had settled in her own mind that Cynthia was the fiancée of her grandson and even flat denials did no more than set her hunting the cause of the apparent mendacity! More, she certainly approved of Cynthia, since she was to be kept in sight by fair means or foul; and it was not impossible that she might be contemplating marrying them in this very house before consenting to her guest's release!

All of which was so ridiculous that Cynthia laughed softly—and paused in astonishment at the very sound. Why, she was taking things calmly at last, wasn't she? She really seemed to be accepting matters in a philosophical way, and that was the most encouraging thing that had happened to Cynthia Blair in several hours; because, for every one thing that has ever been accomplished by headlong action in this old world, ten thousand bigger and better things have been contrived through cool planning and consideration.

Cynthia relaxed further. It was even thinkable—since this was an extraordinarily comfortable bed—that she might turn over and sleep soundly until morning; and then, refreshed as she always was upon rising, that she might bounce into a new day with sufficient vigor and determination of her own to find the way out, safely!

She sighed, drowsily. Who *was* to blame for it all? Well, in simple fact, probably no one more than Cynthia herself, who had come here under false colors in search of her dinner! And she hadn't even won that, had she! She was hungry now—infernally hungry. She sighed, not so drowsily. She was even hungrier than she had been when she entered this wretched house. However, the pangs of shipwrecked sailors may be stilled by Nature after a certain period, it was clear that Cynthia did not own the anatomy of a shipwrecked sailor.

Although—Billy, in the last analysis, was to blame! If Billy had only selected some other night for this wretched business and taken her out and—no, Billy wasn't to blame for anything! Cynthia sat up with a still, small groan, her drowsiness all gone now. Rather, she herself was to blame for wrecking Billy's whole future!

Just what he had accomplished next door, there was no telling; but Cynthia knew her Billy very thoroughly and guessing at this particular phase was no task at all. Cyclonic, indomitable in some respects, William in some others was as easily wounded as a sensitive child. Cynthia, as both of them understood perfectly, was his very life—so he hadn't been quite himself, in there, with the festering knowledge that Cynthia was visiting at the home of one certainly reputed to be an unwholesome person, Neville Ronalds.

And when he had come in here, all overwrought and disturbed, and then had been informed by that terrible woman—brrr! Cynthia buried her face in her hands and trembled and whimpered. Why — *why* hadn't she defied everything and thrown herself into William's arms in that distressing minute? Well mainly, to be sure, because she hadn't dared! If the dear old soul just below meant only one-half of what she had said, what she had looked, on the

subject of girls who played fast and loose with the love of a good man, she might credibly enough have called for an officer and wreaked her vengeance on the spot.

All possibility of slumber had now departed.

Some little time, Miss Blair merely sat and wrung her hands and bit her pretty lips and winked back tears, as she thought and thought. She needed help; that much was certain. Even if she slept for a month, she'd never muster up sufficient craft and energy to conquer Mrs. Stone. This, Cynthia sensed, might be the admission of a weakling; if so, it was a wise enough admission, since it was leading her back to the question of summoning real aid.

She could go on another hunt for a telephone and frighten the seven senses out of Nora by whispering her dire troubles at past two in the morning. If she did that, Towner might still be waiting for her—and again, he might not be, for both these interesting servants were probably convinced by this time that their guest had settled down for the night. And also if she did that, she'd doubtless throw Nora into a state of highest excitement and so ruin Nora's first big business day, as well, which was a new and cheering thought. People don't send for one, to offer one work, and then wait one's own sweet pleasure in coming; witness the matter of the rich Mrs. Wolfert, for whose patronage Cynthia herself had been angling for one long month and who, finding herself ignored, would look up another music teacher for her brood to-morrow! And they were so near and such nice people, too, and with the income from that quintette alone Cynthia could have paid the rent and almost their running expenses and—the afflicted young woman pushed back the hair from her hot brow.

She was in a positive fever! She threw off the clothes and sighed again, looking about quite wildly. The window was partly open. Well, there at least was cold air; Cynthia, in somebody else's very pretty and expensive nightgown, moved restlessly over to the window and, pushing up the sash, leaned out and breathed deeply.

The stillness of the street at that hour was no less than unearthly. At the corner, only an infrequent automobile was passing the park; in the other direction, a surface car clanged faintly and rumbled out of hearing. Beyond these manifestations the whole world might have been stone dead!

But—well, who was whistling? Cynthia, with the mildest interest, looked up and down the block, pausing at last to gaze upon the pavement just below—and suddenly Cynthia's heart thudded so violently that it threatened to beat its way straight out! Below there, looking straight up here, was William Brander himself!

It was the fact! No longer need little Cynthia push back and push back upon that one, sickening certainty—to wit, that William now had deserted her forever! For it was not a certainty; it was, as she knew now with one tremendous rush of joy, the solitary impossible thing on earth. William, truer than any steel, understood and was there to help her.

And he was the one being who could help her, too. William's brain, you see, was larger, more active and more resourceful than any other brain hitherto known in the history of the race. Let her have but five minutes wherein to tell Billy the amazing truth, and he would have the answer.

"Cynthia!" hissed William, his cautious voice taking the three-story flight very nicely.

"Oh, Billy, dearest! Dearest!" whispered Cynthia Blair, and William caught the words. "If you—"

Here she halted. One could not very well whisper the entire history of the case in just that fashion. More, her very soul yearned for the reassuring touch of William's firm hand; one of William's kisses, at just this juncture, was worth more than any computable price.

"Billy! I'll come down! Do you hear?" Cynthia called, ever so softly.

"Yes! I hear!" William said hoarsely.

There was a vibrant gladness in his voice, too, which Cynthia caught; it was just as if William had been worried about something and now was not quite so worried.

He would have been further reassured, could he have seen Cynthia just then.

Cynthia was alive once more in every sense, which included an instinctive caution worthy of a wild thing. Without one sound, her bare little feet carried her to the bed; she snatched up the elaborate pink robe and wrapped it around her; an instant she considered somebody's ornamental bedroom slippers and then shook her head. They were several sizes too large in the first place and they had leather heels.

And still without so much as a rustle, Cynthia opened her door and peered up and down the corridor. The same dim light was burning, the same utter stillness brooded over the big place. Not that Towner was to catch her again, however; Miss Blair approached the hidden niche with the fretful question trembling upon her lips, of why no reading matter was provided here for the sleepless and just which magazines could Towner find and fetch — and the question was not spoken, for the alcove was quite deserted.

These good old-fashioned stairs had regular carpets, too! Miss Blair's pink toes sank into the thick pile as she sped down to the more dimly illuminated corridor of the second floor and gazed into the dark gulf that was the floor below. She was not frightened, with Billy so near. She would admit him just as quietly as possible, of course; she would whisper the truth just as swiftly as possible; she would speed him forth in search of legal aid and—Cynthia Blair, halfway down her second flight, stopped short and gasped.

Would she really do any of these things?

Earlier in the night, Towner had referred to William as her "pal," plainly of the belief that he was her associate in crime. And Mrs. Stone had aired her views as to outside flirtations of the engaged, and she had been fully aware of Billy's almost incredible charm and attraction! Again, about the time that Cynthia had communicated her facts to William, there might be much difficulty in restraining that young man from an outburst on the spot.

So that by admitting him now and then inadvertently knocking over an umbrella stand or raising a voice, or by rousing Towner or some of the others in any one of a dozen other ways, it was extremely likely that Cynthia would be hurling her Billy into the ever-waiting arms of the constabulary.

Innocent? Oh, yes, he was innocent as Cynthia herself, so far as that went, but innocence didn't seem to have its true value in this household. And once he had been arrested—which would be only after a violent battle, resulting in injury to several officers—William's career would also have terminated. Wealthy business concerns do not pick possible criminals for their fifteen thousand dollar jobs!

Cynthia leaned weakly on the stair-rail for a moment and shivered, thankfully. It was the merest mercy that that side of the matter had occurred to her before opening the door. She had been about to sacrifice her Billy; now she would sacrifice only herself which, relatively, was a very small matter indeed. Cynthia moved on, just as soundlessly, but with all the joy gone out of her.

He was waiting impatiently, was William, at the outer of the two thick glass doors. His well-favored countenance was flattened against the pane, in a manner that would have been of greatest interest to a passing officer, and he was seeking to penetrate the gloom within.

And now it had been penetrated! William's sharp eyes had discerned the dim, pinkish form of his beloved; William was waving an excited hand; one could almost imagine him whining and scratching at the door, in his anxiety to enter and hear that Cynthia, after all, was his.

In the gloom, Miss Blair came close to the inner panel of glass, her heart sinking. She shook her head violently—waited to see if the message had carried—found William peering the harder. She shook her head again; she motioned, quite frantically, with one hand, pointing, waving the hand.

"Oh, go! Dearest go!" Cynthia whispered, agonizedly.

"*What?*" asked William, in an injudicious burst of sound.

Cynthia waved both hands now, waved them and waved them! She pointed at William himself—pointed down the steps, down the block.

"You mean for me to go?" William demanded, in astonishment.

Cynthia nodded quite as violently. William seemed almost to reel back for an instant; but he caught himself and straightened up indignantly and—*what was that?*

Miss Blair shrank into the blacker shadows, shaking. Back there, somewhere toward the rear of the house, there had been a sharp, clear tinkle or clank of metal! It wasn't possible—it couldn't be possible that this awful night had not yet exhausted its possibilities, that there was a burglar in the place? It had sounded exactly like some one at the silver, nevertheless.

Well, then, she'd let Billy in and—no, she couldn't do that, could she? She'd scream for help and—no she couldn't scream for help, either, since Billy, did he hear the scream, would batter down the doors to reach her and so become enmeshed! She—Cynthia, very abruptly, laid an iron grip upon herself. What was the matter with her, anyway? Had she turned into a quivering, jumpy creature like Mrs. Ronalds herself?

Just once, she glanced toward the door. Billy was not visible, at this distance—or at any distance, for that matter, she sensed gloomily. Billy had left! Well, she was calm again, at all events. She listened for a further tinkling. There was none and Cynthia turned toward the stairs—fancied that she had really caught the sound again that time—and with commendable determination stepped suddenly, lightly toward the back of the house. There is such a thing as banishing imaginary dangers by walking straight up to them!

She did not mean to explore the floor, to be sure. The right hand which brushed the wall informed her that she had passed through a wide door now; she stopped and listened again, wholly confident that she was alone.

And, just beside her, some one breathed suddenly and two strong arms went about Cynthia Blair and held fast!

She did not scream. For the moment she was too startled even to gasp aloud. She strove to raise her little fists and beat off the invisible horror; she found that she could not raise either arm. She strained energetically — and now, be the consequences what they might, she was about to scream in good earnest; but one of the strong arms left her for an instant and the other tightened, and there was a lurch toward the wall and a tiny click.

Light flared from the dozen electric bulbs overhead and Cynthia Blair gazed straight into the tense countenance of a young man in evening clothes—a rather too beautiful young man, with bold eyes and a dainty black mustache! Savagely this person snarled:

"There, my lad! I got you—" and then the speaker's mouth opened too widely for speech, as Miss Blair's loveliness was revealed to him. "Why, you—you cunning little devil!" he gasped. "I—thought I had a burglar!"

Miss Blair could not even move. The other, after one second of hesitation, replaced about her the arm with which he had switched on the light. He was visibly relieved and more visibly pleased.

"I did for a fact!" he said. "I thought I was catching a real burglar that time and making myself solid in the old homestead for all eternity and—I say, *who are you?*"

"I—let me go!" Cynthia panted.

"Hanged if I will, till I know who you are!" her captor chuckled blithely and with the utmost assurance. "I'll make a guess, little one: the mother-in-law's been hiring a secretary?"

"Whose mother-in-law?"

"Mine, my dear!" said the bold young man. "And I will say that her taste—"

"I'm nobody's secretary!" Cynthia contrived and wrenched herself free. "I'm a—guest!"

"My Lord! Not one of Dora's?" gasped the other, and his hands dropped and he glanced about warily.

"No!"

"Nothing else matters, then," grinned the young man, with a cheery shrug. "She's not home yet, by the way—Dora?"

"I haven't seen her. I—"

"You're wondering who I am and what I'm doing here in the dining room at this hour? I'll tell you; I'm just a mass of honesty, you know—and, anyway, you may be interested in this. I'm little Tom Dale,

Dora's husband! When I come in late, as I do now and then when Dora's away on one of these visits, I do so very quietly; and so far, I will say, I haven't been caught at it," Mr. Dale pursued, and his sufficiently good eyes rolled seductively for Cynthia's benefit. "Although I thought I had been that time, y'know, when I heard some one sneaking down—and I just switched off the lights and waited. However, that's not the point of my being here, is it? The real point," pursued Mr. Dale, and lowered his voice, "is that the old lady takes one good nip a day of the very best Scotch that's distilled on the face of the globe. Where she gets it, I can't say and I've never been able to find out—but grandma's a mean drinker, little one, and when she's done with it she hides it, and sometimes I find it and sometimes I don't. *This* time, I thought I had a line on it and—"

"Thanks, I'm not interested!" said Cynthia, with a small sigh, and turned away.

The eyes, glinting very softly at her, grew profoundly astonished.

"I say, you're not really running away?" Mr. Dale protested. "You mustn't do that, you know. Linger a while and let's get acquainted, my pretty one. You haven't even told me your name!"

Cynthia walked on. The other hurried lightly after her.

"Oh, come, come!" said he. This 'll simply never do! This is no way to treat a lovable, interesting chap who knows where there's a bottle of Scotch! Here! We'll have a small private party, all to ourselves, and—why, this is awful!" said Mr. Dale as Cynthia still walked on. "I can't remember ever having been thrown down like this before! 'Tisn't possible I'm losing my punch, is it or—well, go if you must, then; but I warn you that we're going to be mighty good friends later on, my child!"

Cynthia persisted in her walking. She was at the stairs, now, and mounting steadily, drearily. She had come down with such high hopes, too; she was ascending with the knowledge that she must have puzzled Billy—and that was all. He'd understand, though; Billy was quick to build up accurately almost any kind of proposition from the merest hint.

But, oh, how she wished that circumstances might have permitted her just five minutes with her Billy! Here was the second flight, and Cynthia hurried a trifle, for some restless soul seemed to be moving on this floor, even at this hour— or it might merely have been some one turning in bed, she reflected, for her hearing was preternaturally keen just now. Cynthia sighed and entered her own room and looked about sadly.

There was her bed, still waiting, and she was tired—very tired. But she felt no great longing for sleep. She wished to think, to find some other way out of the mess. She loitered to the window and looked out wearily; this time there would not even be Billy to see.

Although Billy was still there, wasn't he? Cynthia leaned out suddenly, heart thumping again. He was down by the curb and looking up steadily; now he had seen her, for he cried:

"Ha!"

Miss Blair started; this was a loud and not a friendly sound—and for that matter, William, quite irresponsibly, was following it with other sounds, much louder and not at all friendly!

"I saw that!" William shouted. "I saw you in his arms! All right! I'm *through!*"

And he raised both hands together; he tore them apart, with a sweeping gesture and a most expressive one. Watching this gesture even from Cynthia's elevation, one could not entertain the slightest doubt that William really was through!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST ATTEMPT.

WITH these dread words William Brander turned on his heel and, head up, shoulders square, marched away toward the corner, the very picture of a determined young man in the act of leaving forever.

"Billy!" Cynthia cried softly. "Oh, Billy!"

William may have heard or may not

have heard; at all events, he did not turn. He marched on, to the corner. With never the hint of a backward glance, he turned the corner. He was, this time, in ghastliest fact, *gone!*

Cynthia's eyes closed. She was slipping —slipping—she caught herself. She had been on the very verge of fainting! Now, with more than a little effort, with heart-broken tears trickling down her cheeks, she scuffed back to the bed and threw herself across it, not for the first time that night, to sob out her very heart!

Billy was gone, you see—he was just gone forever and ever, and for Cynthia life itself, as such, was at an end. He had heard enough, Heaven knew, from Mrs. Stone, to cast certain doubts upon Cynthia's constancy; and still, because through somebody's oversight there is as yet no law upon the books compelling one to believe all that one hears, he had returned to learn the real truth from Cynthia herself.

And she had puzzled him by indicating that he must go—and immediately thereafter she had removed the puzzling element and replaced it with something much more positive: just how the picture had looked to William there was no way of telling, but the solid fact remained that she had been revealed with both that detestable little brute's arms about her.

So this was the end—the end. Billy would never come back now, here or elsewhere, never! This pretty theme dinned through Cynthia's brain and dinned; and she moaned and whimpered. And then, after a considerable time, she ceased her moaning and her whimpering and sat up and even forced a shaky little smile. Because Billy, you know, really wasn't an idiot!

He had gone away in a towering rage, which, everything considered, was not at all remarkable; indeed, Cynthia could hardly have loved a young man who would not have gone away in a towering rage. But he was by no means the type that rushes to suicide. This imprisonment of Cynthia's couldn't last forever; and once she was free, she'd convince her Billy of the truth, if she had to summons every last member of this accursed household into court to do it! Years ago, according to some of the quaint old lore she had heard, she would simply have shriveled up and died, without ever seeking Billy again, because that would have been the maidenly thing to do. Well, Cynthia, thank fortune, was of the vital common sense present!

Yes, and accursed household was just what she meant, and she could have put it more strongly than that without much effort! Miss Blair's eyes flashed fiercely. This last fit of weeping seemed to have washed away many of the cobwebs. The sense of outrage was growing stronger and stronger. She had been trapped here and willfully misunderstood; she had been ordered about by an eccentric old lady and bullied by a maid; she had been manhandled by a lady-killing creature and by him, apparently, had been appraised as the sort of female likely to succumb to his charms! She had even been starved.

This last was an unfortunate thought, since it renewed suddenly certain pangs somewhat dulled by recent happenings. Hands clasped, eyes narrowed, Cynthia breathed ominously for a matter of one minute. Then, with an amount of decision that would have done credit to a descendant of the late Colonel Halling himself, she slipped from the bed and stood erect.

There was at least one form of suffering which they should not inflict upon her: the whole fool ménage was asleep by this time, and Cynthia Blair would raid their ice box! If, in so doing, she chanced to fall down a flight of stairs or overturn a divan, and thus rouse them all, so much the better: it was high time that they, too, did a little suffering!

Although she had no intention of doing these things deliberately, of course; in fact, once out of the room, Cynthia proceeded with the utmost caution. What might happen on the return trip did not matter so very much, but she had no desire at all to pause for any extended arguments on her way to the pantry.

And so, to be sure, here she was going downstairs again! A small, hysterical giggle all but made itself audible. Here was the second floor, with which she was growing quite familiar. The barefooted Cyn-

thia stepped along almost blithely, toward the next flight—and stopped!

Somebody *was* awake! Yes, somebody had moved, in that very room to her right. It might be all imagination, but it seemed very much as if some one were approaching the door!

Well, then? It wasn't Mrs. Ronalds, because she lived back there—and it wasn't Mrs. Stone, because her quarters were up front! At a very safe guess, the servants occupied the top of the house. So this restless person must be Mr. Dale, of the daring eyes and the too adorable little mustache; and Cynthia's lips curled and she shrank away from that door, for she had no wish at all to meet Mr. Dale again.

And he *was* approaching his door! Miss Blair looked around swiftly in the very dim light of the corridor. With all present accounted for and placed, this room directly opposite must be empty. Cynthia laid her hand upon the knob and turned it—and slipped in, with a certain small thrill of satisfaction, to wait until Mr. Dale should have satisfied himself that the corridor was empty!

And then, even as she stood and listened, the room was bathed in soft light — and Cynthia gasped and whirled about and, for a little instant, could not believe her excellent eyes. For, his hand still upon the cord of his bedside lamp, Mr. Dale himself was sitting up, all resplendent in blue silk pyjamas, from beneath the folds of a blue silk quilt!

A moment he, too, blinked complete incredulity at the vision in the pink robe. Another, and he smiled widely, even delightedly.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "This is a bit daring, isn't it? This—"

"Oh!" gasped Cynthia Blair. "And again: "Oh!"

And even yet she had not moved, although life was returning to her reluctantly. One hand went out with an aimless swing, as if to push away the pyjamaed person; the other fumbled for the knob. Ah, and she had it now, and she had opened the door—and she was out in the corridor once more.

She—she had turned giddy, too! She was seeing brilliant light, where she knew quite well that the corridor was very poorly illuminated. She steadied herself for an instant, and would have turned back toward her own room, but the same tricky eyes indicated that some one was standing in her path, and at that very second a shriek rang through the corridor, through the house, so shrill, so penetrating, of such remarkable volume that Cynthia winced and stumbled backward, into the wall, and thrust out both hands defensively.

Some few alarming seconds, Miss Blair felt that she understood: she had gone mad! That sort of thing does happen when one has starved long enough and has been subjected to too great a strain. It—it was nothing she couldn't conquer, for it was bound to be transient, and hers was a strong will. By denying the existence of lights and noises and all the rest, she'd master strength enough to get back to her room—yes, and to lock the door securely against any chance, mistaken wanderings of the Dale beast. So Cynthia pulled herself together; and once more the frightful scream split the night!

There was no denying its reality this time. Others had heard; there were audible stirrings to front, to rear, even overhead. And the person ahead of Cynthia was just as real!

She seemed to be a girl not much older than Cynthia herself, and there all similarity ceased. Where Cynthia still retained much of the child, this young woman was heavier and distinctly mature. Where Cynthia was beautiful, this young woman—well, in a greatly modified way, she bore strong resemblance to Mrs. Stone. Where Cynthia was a quick, intelligent little creature under normal circumstances, the first glance seemed to hint that this unexpected girl would not be highly intelligent under any conceivable circumstances. But she was quick enough when it came to emitting her shrieks, to be sure. Not five seconds had passed since her first admirable effort, but now, clutching about her a rather aged gray robe, she prepared to vent the third shriek—and changed her mind and permitted her blue eyes to fasten upon Cynthia in horror and loathing, as she said:

"Oh! Oh! *Ugh!*" And one hand clasped her cheek and she shrank back very dramatically and added: "Oh—you *thing!*"

Cynthia steadied herself. Yes, she could still speak, if she took it slowly!

"If you—are—" she began, steadily.

"If I'm his wife—*if* I'm his wife!" the other cried, surprisingly, and laughed in a shrill, horrid way. "Really, we haven't had the pleasure of meeting before, have we?"

"No, we have not, and it's no pleasure to me right now!" Cynthia managed, not with the nicest judgment. "For if you think—"

"Oh, but it's a great pleasure to *me!*" the apparent Mrs. Dale cried. "I've heard my husband speak of you so often lately!"

"You've heard him speak of *me?*" Cynthia gasped.

"Oh, yes, indeed! Again and again—in his sleep, you know—*Gertie!*" Mrs. Dale laughed again, and the amount of scorn with which she contrived to load this latest laugh was little less than incredible.

"My—my name isn't Gertie!" the unfortunate guest stammered.

"Really? It isn't?" cried the outraged wife. "So there's more than one other woman in his life just now, is there? I'm not astonished! I'm—I'm still controlling myself, you see, but—but I don't know how much longer I shall be able to do that! I—if you don't get out of my sight, I'll—I'll tear that paint off your cheeks and the skin with it! I'll—*aha!*

The lady threw back her head and laughed even once more, as she turned toward the door so lately closed by Cynthia Blair.

It was opening now, slowly, fumblingly, and in it young Mr. Dale appeared. He was blinking energetically and looking vastly confused and sleepy; he was, in fact, going through every motion of a gentleman just rudely aroused from deepest slumber; and now he rubbed his eyes and demanded:

"Here! What's—what's the row here? What's — why, Dora dearest!" he ended, with a great, glad cry, and extended his arms.

"You needn't go through with all that!" said Dora. "I saw her, you know! I *saw* her leave your room!"

"Saw — saw — what are you talking about, honey?" Mr. Dale inquired, and smiled blankly and blandly. "Darling, I —I had no idea that you were home!"

"*There's* the first honest thing, perhaps, you've ever said to me!" the unhappy lady responded, and her voice was trembling quite emotionally now. "Oh, I—even knowing what you are, I couldn't have believed this! I couldn't have believed that you were so utterly lost to everything decent as—as to bring a woman of this kind into your very home! Into *my* very home, where—where I was a happy little child for—for so many years before you—"

"Well, that 'll be enough of that, Dora, anyhow," sighed Mr. Dale, and cast aside all pretense of sleepiness. "Of course I see what's the matter with you. You—"

"Oh! *Do* you?"

"Those darned Allens have probably been driving you around in their infernal car till you're exhausted and hysterical and —and imagining things," pursued the husband, gathering confidence. "As to this—er—very charming young lady leaving my room—or any one else leaving my room—why, that's preposterous! She couldn't very well have left it without being there in the first place, and she wasn't there in the first place, you know. Miss—ah—I don't even know who you are, of course," he continued, bowing stiffly to Cynthia, "but I—I wish to apologize for my wife. She is not herself!"

Mrs. Dale inhaled noisily, vibrantly.

"After I've actually seen her, with my very eyes, coming out of your—why, do you think me an utter imbecile?" she gasped.

"No, Dora!" the young man said sternly. "But I think, and know, that you're an extremely silly girl and imaginative to the highest degree. Whatever injury I'm forced to suffer because of that, is one thing. But that a perfectly innocent girl, with whom I'm not even acquainted, should be made the victim of your insane—"

"And she's taken my place so completely that you've given her my pink robe! She's even wearing one of my nightgowns!"

"She—huh?" said Mr. Dale, and started and glanced at Cynthia. "Are those yours, Dora? Why, yes, I guess they are, aren't they? Did—ah—some one lend you those, Miss—ah—I still don't know your name."

"Yes! Some one did!" Cynthia began, with considerable force of her own. "And—"

"Don't speak to me! Either of you!" panted Mrs. Dale. "You're too loathsome—too vile—too horrible!"

"Well, I'm not any viler than anybody else, and I'm blest if I see anything vile about Miss—whatever her name may be!" the gentleman in the case answered. "If you'll get down to earth for about two minutes, Dora, I'll do my best to explain just—"

"Oh, no! No, you will not! There's nothing that need be explained, thank you. This time, I've seen; I haven't suspected that you were what you are, or feared it, or heard gossip about it: I've *seen!* Tom, I've been lying in my bed for two solid hours, knowing that something was wrong—wrong! I've had a hideous feeling that something was about to happen. I couldn't sleep; I've been up a dozen times to listen. I supposed that you were asleep when I came home; that's why I didn't disturb you. And then, some time ago, I thought I heard you sneak in and—just a little while ago—I thought I heard *her* moving about in your room and—"

"But I tell you—"

"And then," hissed Mrs. Dale melodramatically, and counted off the words with one shaking finger, "I opened my door and watched, and she came out!"

Now the infuriated lady turned her whole attention to Cynthia, whisking about to look her up and down and up again, and then to laugh. Her lips curled, her nostrils were wide; despite the fury that was rising in her own gentle bosom, it occurred to Cynthia that each of these laughs was just a shade less responsible than its predecessor.

"And you!" pursued Mrs. Dale. "I've heard of such creatures as *you!* Thank Heaven, I've been too carefully guarded ever to have seen one at close range before! But now that I have—"

"Woman!" choked Cynthia Blair. "Stop! Do you hear? Stop right there!"

"Oh! Oh! We're quite angry, aren't we?" cried the outraged wife.

"Because I've stood enough at the hands of your ridiculous family to-night, without standing any more from you!" the guest panted. "I entered this—this pretty creature's room by accident and—"

"Oh, no! The accident wasn't just there! It was in the time you picked to leave his room!"

Cynthia swallowed twice.

"Well, I've always been pretty civilized," she managed gustily, "and until this minute I never knew how it felt to—to want to tear out another woman's hair and—"

"A-a-a-ah!" screamed Mrs. Dale, and backed away with both hands raised. "Oh, mother! Grandmother!"

"But if you vent any more of your cheap filth on me, something like that stands a chance of happening here!"

"And you!" the unhappy lady gasped, directly at her husband. "*You'll* stand there and let her attack me!"

"Dora—"

"Oh, yes, you will! You *want* her to attack me, don't you! You want her to *kill* me! That would be the simplest way of getting rid of me, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, Dora, for the love of—" said Dale.

"That's the very thing you want most—that both of you want most!" the lady reiterated. "Well, I'll disappoint you!"

And she all but whizzed back into her own room; and on the instant Mr. Dale turned a sickly green.

"She—I say! She's gone in there to kill herself! Something—something 'll have to be done!" he said.

"Well, I—well, I—" was the best that Cynthia could do at the moment.

"You shouldn't have said that, you know, about pulling out her hair. She's very timid—she's very excitable! Dora's a very high-strung, sensitive—"

He, too, ceased just there. Dora, as it happened, had reappeared. She wore a long cloak of exquisite sable now; otherwise, she was quite as before. With the same whizzing effect, she passed them and sped to-

ward the stairs; and, with one hand on the rail, she paused for an instant.

"*Now* I'm going out and scream until the police come to protect me!" she stated. "Now I'm going out and scream until the whole neighborhood's roused, and I'm going to have them all in here and show them—*show* them—my husband and his—his guest!"

Miss Blair had turned to solid ice.

That portion of her brain designed for the visualizing of things about to happen was growing positively overstrained this night. Distinctly as if they were approaching at this second she could hear the babel of voices below; vividly as if they were already before her she could see the gaping crowd, disheveled people in the main, with a trim uniform or two.

And among them, in the nature of things, would be some of the Mortons from next door. And among these Mortons would be at least one person to whom Billy Brander had exhibited the picture of herself which reposed in his watch case.

So that, even if none of this ever found its way into the public prints, there would be some one to tell the tale to Billy and identify the victim. William, cooled down, was not beyond ordinary reason; but William, having heard a story like this from reliable lips, having added to it certain circumstantial bits already gnawing at his mind—well, Billy, this time, was lost!

"If you—will just wait a moment!" said a sweet, low voice, which came from a great distance, yet which still seemed to be Cynthia's. "I'm sure—"

"Oh! You think you're going to stop me, do you?" asked Mrs. Dale, with another of her laughs. "Well, try that! Try to stop me—*thing!*"

Then she moved on.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNTIL MORNING.

AND it was all over now but the hideous climax—all over. One dizzy instant Miss Blair was minded to hurl herself upon the infuriated lady and stay her; she did not move, however. The acute stage of this trouble seemed to have been precipitated by her own threat of physical violence, the first in all her years. What form of disaster would follow an actual attack there was no surmising; the only certainty was that it would be something worse than what had gone before. That was the way with this night.

She'd just have to go on and— Why, people were moving around her now, Miss Blair discovered suddenly. Mrs. Ronalds had approached from the rear; Mrs. Stone, a distinctly ominous figure in her own heavy robe, had approached, scowling, from the front. There were steps on the stairs above, too, and Towner was peeping over the banisters and adjusting his glasses, and there seemed even to be some one behind Towner.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" said Cornelia Ronalds, and clasped her hands and looked wildly about.

"What's the trouble? What devil's to-do going on here, anyway?" rasped Cornelia's mother.

From the lower stairway there came a scream; ah, and Dora was ascending again, wasn't she? Dora had flitted past Cynthia, even now, and had thrown her ample arms about Mrs. Ronalds's thin neck as she cried:

"Mother! Oh, mother!"

"Tah! Hysterics!" observed Dora's grandmother. "What was it that started them?"

The pretty young man's wife, albeit she had no more than begun a soothing spell of weeping on her mother's shoulder, whirled about.

"Started them? Started them?" she shrilled. "Well, are you blind, grandmother? Can't you see the woman for yourself?"

Mrs. Stone scowled amazedly.

"You mean this girl? Cynthia?" she demanded.

"You—you—it can't be that you *know* her?" Dora gasped, and threw up her large and not strikingly beautiful hands. "It isn't possible that she has been accepted in this house? It isn't possible that my own mother—my own grandmother—have turned against me and—"

"Nobody's turned against you!" Mrs. Stone rapped out. "This is the girl Neville's going to marry."

"Neville—my brother!" Mrs. Dale choked.

"Most certainly! This is Cynthia Blair."

Slowly Mrs. Dale passed her right hand over her bewildered eyes; as slowly she passed her left hand over the same eyes. Then she laughed very harshly.

"Isn't it rather sudden? I hadn't heard a hint of it, you know. But I should think that, before welcoming her with open arms, as you seem to have done, it might have been well to learn whether she was—er—quite all right?"

Jane Stone leaned on her cane and scowled blackly.

"She is!" she snapped. "*I* know people!"

"Oh! Do you really? Well, you don't know this one, apparently. Or else your views on morality have undergone a change within the last day or two."

"*What!*"

"Oh, a decided change!" responded Mrs. Dale, and her fury blazed up afresh. "I caught her coming out of Tom's room just as she is!"

"You—oh, rot!" the eldest lady thundered. "You're—"

"Oh, no, it's not rot!" her granddaughter screamed. "I—I came home because I had a feeling that I ought to be here. George Allen and Maude wanted me to stay with them to-night—we drove all the way into town after their little dinner—but I had them drop me here, and I came in just as quietly as possible—into my own home—the home where I've grown up, an innocent girl, and—"

"Leave out that part!" directed her grandmother. "Why do you think she came out of his room?"

"Haven't I told you that I saw her? Isn't that enough?"

"No, it is not. It sounds like a lot of hysterical drivel to me," Mrs. Stone said readily. "This girl never—"

"I tell you, she did!" Mrs. Dale repeated, and turned suddenly, heartbrokenly to her mother. "*You* believe me?"

"I—of course," Cornelia assented tremulously. "Although it does not seem possible."

"But it is!"

"Then it—it must be!" sighed Mrs. Ronalds.

"Well, is it, or isn't it?" Jane Stone barked. "Were you in there, or were you not, Cynthia?"

"I opened his beastly door by accident—and came out again instantly and closed it. That is the entire story."

"But she did see you coming out, eh?" Mrs. Stone inquired, and peered at her guest rather too keenly.

"I presume so. If she had been watching thirty seconds earlier she'd also have seen me going in."

"And that explanation is to be accepted?" Mrs. Dale inquired with some asperity.

"I guess so," grunted her grandmother. "I know enough about Cynthia to—"

"Well, it isn't accepted by me!" the injured lady said crisply. "I demand that she be put out of this house, here and now!"

Miss Blair's heart gave one great leap. She drew herself up.

"Very well! I'll go!" she cried.

"Oh, no, you won't, Cynthia," Mrs. Stone corrected. "You won't do anything of the sort. I've been at some pains to persuade you to visit with us for a while, my dear. I'll stake fifty thousand dollars on my judgment of people, any old time, and I'll say that you—"

"Well, she goes, or I go!" Dora put in. "This is your house, grandmother; I can't force you to eject her. But I won't stay under the same roof with *that* choice pair! After what I've seen to-night I haven't much pride or self-respect left; what I have, I mean to keep."

"All right—all right!" Mrs. Stone said most irascibly, and it was clear that her patience was nearing the snapping point. She turned and glowered at him who was infinitely the most inconspicuous figure of that gathering. "Here! *You* get on your clothes and get out of here!" she ordered. "Communicate with me in a day or two, and I'll let you know when, or if, you're to come back. Move!"

"Eh? What? Gad, yes! Delighted to do that!" Mr. Dale chattered. "Like to stay here and prove my innocence, but—but this distrust of Dora's breaks my heart and I'd rather—"

The door closed upon him. His wife's eye glinted.

"If he goes, *she* stays!" she said warningly. "I will not permit—"

"She'll stay!" Mrs. Stone responded grimly.

After this came a brief and rather merciful lull, broken mainly by certain muffled, hurried movements of Mr. Dale's and by the sobs of his wife, who had collapsed, so far as possible, into the frail arms of her mother. A minute or more Mrs. Stone considered her victim in a peculiarly pensive way—and was about to speak—and desisted, and muttered to herself instead.

"Oh, she's a bad one—*a bad one*, Towner!" said the faintest breath of a whisper from overhead.

Cynthia glanced upward quite fiercely and went on, a little less calmly, with certain meditations of her own. Somewhere in this distinctly unpleasant situation an opportunity for escape seemed to be lurking: a brilliant person, she suspected, would have found this opportunity; Cynthia, then, wasn't a brilliant person, because in spite of—well, it couldn't be that Dale had managed his toilet in this short time?

He was there, nevertheless, dapper enough in a gray business suit; and with it he seemed to have assumed an air of wounded innocence. It is just possible that second thought had revealed to Mr. Dale that, for once in a way, he was really entirely guiltless.

"I'm going!" he said simply.

Not one hand was raised to stay him.

"I won't bother packing anything now," Mr. Dale pursued, with quiet dignity. "I'll let you know to-morrow where I'm staying and Towner can bring me a couple of grips. Dora!"

"I don't wish to speak to you!" said Dora.

"Still it might be well, before turning me out of the house, to hear what I have to say in explanation?"

"I shouldn't believe a word of it!"

"But—"

"I don't believe you! I don't believe you! I don't believe you can tell or act the truth!"

Mr. Dale drew himself up and bowed coldly.

"So be it!" he said. "It may be some time before you see me again, Dora!"

"I don't believe you!" Dora persisted gustily.

"Good morning!" said Dora's husband.

Shoulders square, he marched to the stairs and down them. Steadily he descended to the main floor of the big house; and there was a rustling as he donned his overcoat, and then a little clanking as he undid bolts. Following this there was the studiedly gentle closing of the door—and then only silence again.

Dora shattered it with one long wail and returned to her mother's shoulder.

"Towner!" barked Mrs. Stone. "You're sneaking around somewhere up there?"

"I—I was on the way down to see what was wrong, madam," the butler said. "If some one's ill—"

"Nobody is. Go down and bolt the front door!" said the real master of the house. "And the rest of you, get to bed! Good Lord Almighty! I haven't had one solid hour's sleep so far to-night. You take your daughter in with you, Cornelia, and quiet her down. "And as for you," she said evenly enough to Miss Blair, "*you* come with me. I want to talk to you for a few minutes."

"Yes, I have a few things I wish to say myself," Cynthia responded very crisply.

Because, all the rest of the madness apart, that matter of Mr. Dale was one which Miss Blair proposed to have cleared up on the spot. That sort of thing, aided by the efforts of an hysterical and not very intelligent wife, has a way of getting beyond control and doing untold damage.

Cynthia waited, tight-lipped, until Mrs. Stone had settled in her chair with a heavy and disgusted sigh; another moment the lady devoted to scowling at the floor and shaking her head; then she looked up at Cynthia.

"I know people; *I* know you're all right!" she said gruffly. "If you hadn't

been, I'd never have kept you here—and I don't know now that I'm particularly glad I did that, in the first place."

"I'll leave just as soon as I've said what I have to say!"

"You—will—not!" barked Mrs. Stone more testily. "D'ye suppose I'll have Dora find out that you've gone and take to throwing more fits all over the place? You'll stay and you'll listen and not talk quite so much, young woman! We're here alone; let's get right down to brass tacks. What *were* you doing in that room?"

"I wasn't there for more than thirty seconds. I've told you that already!"

Mrs. Stone stared darkly.

"Don't adopt that tone with me, please. You haven't told me what you were roaming about the house for at such an hour?"

"No? Well, I can do that very easily!" Cynthia responded, with a bitter little laugh. "I was on my way to steal—"

"*Hey?*" cried the elder lady, although the exclamation had nothing to do with Cynthia. Rather did it bear upon certain strange, thick cries coming from the street beneath her window. Mrs. Stone turned, scowling, and devoted another little period of listening to the scratching, scuffling sounds.

These, unquestionably, were coming from the steps beneath the partly open window. There was a thud, as of some one striking the outer door, and a small, choking, blood-curdling cry of agony. Next, locks rattled, and there were indistinguishable mutterings in Towner's voice—and there was a slam and a gasp and another heavy thud.

"My soul!" cried Towner. "He's dead!"

Over Mrs. Stone's strong features came a wave of red-hot, unreasoning wrath.

"Say! Have things come to such a pass that they stagger in here from the street to do their dying?" she demanded wildly. "Do they have to pick on this household even for—"

She said no more. She was out of her chair and moving rapidly toward the door, and the startled Cynthia was following.

Mrs. Ronalds and her interesting daughter had been roused, too, it seemed. The latter paused just an instant to sear Cynthia with one look of hatred, of utter loathing. Then she clung to her mother again and, chattering their terror, the pair pushed close to Mrs. Stone, plodding downstairs ahead of them.

Nor did the scene in the broad corridor below lack a certain interest of its own.

Towner seemed to be in the act of helping to its feet what had once been a dapper little man in a gray suit. Towner's snap diagnosis had been wrong, too, for the unfortunate being still lived; it waved its hands and gurgled; it tried to stand erect and finally succeeded, although it kept a grip on Towner—and upon closer inspection one saw that it might, once upon a time, have been Thomas Dale!

But frightful things had happened to Mr. Dale in the very brief interval since his departure; at present he resembled nothing so much as a person who has endeavored to topple over, single-handed, a speeding ten-ton truck. His attractive eyes, even now, were disappearing behind two great, blackish puffs; his nose was bleeding freely, and the mouth, when opened, showed a shortage of teeth that had not existed ten minutes ago. More, Mr. Dale's collar and tie had disappeared completely and one sleeve of his nice gray coat was missing, too.

But there were marks enough left to identify him beyond any reasonable question, and, perceiving them, Dora screamed shrilly and hid her face upon her mother's shoulder once more. Mrs. Stone moved on until she stood before the wreckage, looking it up and down with a grim look of emotion.

"You, is it?" she grunted. "What hit you? Automobile?"

"I—I—send for—for reserves!" Mr. Dale gasped. "Round 'em—up while they are in the—neighborhood."

"Thugs!"

"A—a gang!" Mr. Dale choked out. "Down by—by the corner! Evening clothes, one of—'em wore! Good-looking chap, I thought, just before—you see, he—they—jumped out of an area, I think, and—is—is some one sending for a doctor?"

He swayed against Towner, who clucked repeatedly with his tongue and adjusted his

glasses again with one hand. His wife—a shallow soul, to be sure, or she must have rushed to his aid in this crisis—merely wept on more loudly. Jane Stone considered her heavily and considered her mother; she glanced at Cynthia, too, and then she stood a little more erectly, and her eyes glittered and the breath she took entered with a thin, whistling sound.

"Towner!" she said vibrantly. "Wash him off and then tie some beefsteak on his face and put him to bed. If he has any broken bones send for Dr. Larriway."

"Yes, madam," breathed Towner.

"And for the rest of you—*listen!*" the lady pursued, and her voice was thunder coming nearer and nearer. "Two years ago, when this place got unbearable, I threatened to buy Jim Wilton's forty-thousand-acre ranch, build myself a house in the middle of it, and I told you then that if I did that I'd cut you all off without a nickel!"

Her cane came down with a hard thud. Even Mr. Dale sought to open one eye and gaze at her; daughter and granddaughter alike stood frozen.

"Well, by crickey, that ranch is still for sale and all I said then goes now! If this whole damned kit an' boodle isn't in bed inside three minutes, and in bed to stay, I quit! D'ye hear? I *quit!*"

They were moving, even then, all except Cynthia Blair. Cynthia's lovely lips curled their scorn as she smiled at the tyrant.

"I'm not at all interested in whether you quit or not, you know," she observed, from quite an altitude. "There are some things which I wish to say to you, and I propose to say them *now!*"

Mrs. Stone caught her breath and whirled upon her guest, in the most impolite way. There was a queer effect in the narrowed eyes beneath the beetling brows: they seemed actually to be spitting white flame!

"Is—that—so?" demanded the lady, in a voice of really greater volume than any Cynthia had heard so far. "Anything you have to say to me, you'll say after breakfast, young woman! I'm going to get some sleep now if I have to call out the army to get it for me! You go to bed or *you know what you'll get!* You hear me?"

So Cynthia went to bed.

Oh, yes, she went at once, holding her head as high as possible, but going, nevertheless. Attempting an argument with an eccentric woman in Mrs. Stone's present frame of mind would have been no less than absurd; a child could have seen that. And in any event there was nowhere else to go. Cynthia was not particularly daring; it was between three and four in the morning, now; decidedly, even if Mrs. Stone had permitted it, she wouldn't have tried going home at this hour.

Also, every one would be calmer in the morning—or the later morning. Miss Blair, sitting on her bed again, decided that she would insist upon a quorum, when it came to establishing her complete innocence. Dale himself would have to be there, too, whether or not his health permitted.

She shook her sweet, bewildered head. Punishment had come swiftly to Dale! And it had come to her, too, and punishment out of all proportion to her original crime, which had been that of being hungry!

Cynthia Blair leaned on the footboard and gazed across the room with dazed, feverish eyes. That was the simple, actual fact, wasn't it? Solely because she had been possessed of a healthy, normal craving for food, she was here with her young life well on the way to a wreckage as complete as that which had overtaken the physical part of Mr. Dale!

And for the matter of that, she was still hungry! It was as if the whole of mankind had conspired quite successfully to keep dinner from Cynthia Blair; Cynthia's laugh was a small, unwholesome, dreary sound. She couldn't quite define it, but this was no longer the good old natural hunger; it was more of a neurotic craving now, such as the addict knows for his drug.

CHAPTER XV.

TO THE RESCUE.

NORA should have been singing.

Nora always sang when she was happy, and she should have been happy this early morning, for hope was in sight at last and the weary months were

about to be repaid with some real money and some regular work. Yet, Nora was neither happy nor inclined to vocalism, for she was afflicted this morning with a very bad case of what is technically known as the jumps.

This might, of course, have been laid to pure intuition; it is much more likely, however, that it hailed from the fact that this was the first night of their New York sojourn that Cynthia had been away from home—and Nora had been a sort of watchful elder sister to her cousin, ever since early childhood, and she cherished, moreover, a faint, lurking impression that in a town of such size no young, pretty and innocent girl is ever really safe.

All of which, on the other hand, she knew to be purest nonsense. Cynthia was a woman grown now, entirely self-reliant, entirely able to look out for herself. And there are police galore, all over the great city, and it was safe to assume that one good scream would reach some of them at any time—assuming such emergency as might render screaming necessary, which was also nonsensical to a degree.

So, knowing that there was no more need of worrying about little Cynthia than there was in worrying about next week's weather, Nora continued to worry most energetically. She was at the peak of her worst frowning spell when the knock came on the door of the two-and-bath-and-kitchenette; Nora heaved one tremendous sigh of relief; at least the kid had had sense enough to come home early, and so end the suspense!

Nora opened the door with a swing. Then Nora's glad cry died in her throat—for only William Brander walked past her into the flat, and a William that Nora had never seen before! This person's mouth was hard and his eyes were ringed and savage; he strode on past her, into the living room and there, incredibly, he stopped and snapped:

"Close that door and come back here, Nora. I want to talk to you!"

"But—what? Bill! Nothing's—nothing's wrong with Cynthia?" Nora cried.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," said Mr. Brander. "Nora, I thought you were a friend of mine?"

"Well, I am! I——"—

"Then why didn't you tell me? Why didn't *you* tell me, at least?" William cried, and his voice broke.

"Tell you *what?*"

"That she was engaged!"

Nora closed her eyes for an instant and her brow puckered.

"Well, why on earth should *I* tell you she's engaged to you?" she asked.

"Hah! That's just where the catch comes in: she's not!" said Mr. Brander, and threw up his hands. "Damnation! I don't believe there's a square woman on earth!" he stated further and with great feeling. "Why, I heard that you'd been out with him, and that struck me funny and I'd meant to speak to you about it. But that you two ever could have made such an ass of me and—"

"Out with whom?"

"Ronalds—Neville Ronalds, the dirty little rat!"

"Well, what has he to do with this conniption of yours?"

"Do with it?" William shouted. "He's engaged to Cynthia!"

You may assume that, at this, Nora exclaimed in amazement. She did not; she was not the exclaiming kind. Nora, after one long stare at the young man, drew a chair to his side.

"Something's all wrong with you, of course Billy," she said very quietly. "It isn't possible that your business dinner last night strung itself out into a bootleg party, is it?"

"You mean that I'm drunk?" William laughed bitterly. "I'm not drunk. I've taken three drinks in my life so far and the last one was a year ago. You can't get away with that baby-stare stuff, Nora."

"I'm not getting away with anything!" Nora snapped. "I'm trying to find out what you're talking about. Where did you get this fool idea? Who's been lying to you?"

William sneered and shrugged.

"I'd hate to say, Nora," he answered, discourteously enough. "It was Ronalds's grandmother who gave me the glad news—right in Ronalds's house, with Cynthia standing beside her and never even bother-

ing to deny a word of it. My—my business dinner was just next door, you know, and I saw Cyn going in and I couldn't get the number of *that!* Then she tortured me by going downstairs and playing all the things I hate, so I'd have to hear them through the wall. Then when I couldn't stand it any longer I went in and—and they gave me the news! They're having a party next Thursday evening to celebrate the engagement, and I was invited! They—"

"Wait!" Nora cried. "Is this actual fact or something you've been—been conjuring up out of your imagination?"

"Fact!" William echoed. "D'ye think I'm a nut or a dope fiend, Nora? Is it fact that I went there last night, all set to gather in a fifteen thousand dollar job? Is it a fact that I got so worked up that they must have thought me an idiot? I'll say it's fact, fast enough! I suppose that's wrecked, too! Morton said he'd have to hear more of it; he was impressed enough that I'm supposed to follow him to Cleveland to-day and tell him the rest, anyhow. And I can't go! I'm shot to bits, Nora! I'm done! If my own mother had thrown me down flat, it couldn't have hurt any more than this does! Women!" cried William, and one great tear shot out of his right eye as he bowed his head. "*Women!*"

Nora Blair, considerably paler, nodded.

"Rave it out of your system," she said. "I want to get at the truth."

"But I'll kill him!" William pursued, looking up with flaming eyes. "As sure as you're born, I'll kill him, Nora, if I have to follow him down through hell to do it! If I can't have her, he won't! I made a pretty good start last night; he went out for something and I gave him a sample of what's coming later! I spoiled his looks, at least!" Mr. Brander laughed, irresponsibly. "I wanted to rip off his little mustache, but it slipped in my fingers and—"

"Ronalds hasn't any little mustache!"

"Oh, yes, he has—a dear, sweet little black thing!" said the unfortunate youth. "And the next time I get my hands on it, the lip 'll come along with it!"

"Then it will be the wrong lip, because he has no mustache, and if he had it wouldn't be black. He's sandy!"

"What are you talking about?" said William. "Isn't she engaged to him? Didn't I see him hugging her?"

"No, I don't think you did, but—"

"I tell you I did!" Mr. Brander cried violently. "Nora, even after the old hag had told me, and Cynthia never denying it, I couldn't believe it! It didn't seem real; it seemed like something that simply couldn't be. And I went home, to try to think it out, and I couldn't stand that rotten room and so I went back to see if I couldn't get a glimpse of Cynthia, and I did. She was in a window, upstairs, and she saw me and came down."

"Yes? Yes?"

"Well, all she came down for was to tell me to get out!" William laughed, horribly. "She didn't open the door; she just waved me away—and not two minutes after they thought I'd gone, they turned on the lights in one of the back rooms and she—she was in his arms. In her bare feet and a night-gown and a bathrobe, she was in his arms!"

"I don't believe it!" Nora cried hotly. "It wasn't Cynthia!"

"I couldn't, either, with the thing happening right before my eyes, but it was Cynthia, all right. They seemed to be having a little confab and I suppose she was telling him I might be out there and to be careful! Anyhow, they broke the clinch and Cynthia went upstairs; and he poured himself out a quart or so of booze and drank it and went up after her. I—I guess I went crazy for a while, Nora!" said William, and lines of agony were in his face. "I hunted all over the street for a rock, to bust my way through those doors and get at him, and there wasn't so much as a pebble. Then I hung around for hours, because I couldn't go away and—and oh!" cried Mr. Brander, and dropped his head again.

"Is that all you have to tell?" Nora asked, with peculiar steadiness.

"Isn't it enough?" William gasped.

"Altogether too much, if there's any truth in it. And there's not! I know Cynthia, Billy. I know every thought in her little head. If she's been acting like this, something's happened to her. And I knew something was happening to her; I

felt it!" Nora cried, wringing her hands for an instant and then regaining self-control. "What's their telephone number? Do you know?"

"No use in trying that, Nora, Cynthia isn't talking to her old friends any more. She wouldn't last night; she'd just left word that she didn't care to see me or have anything to do with me or—"

"Bosh!" the elder Miss Blair all but shouted.

"Oh, yes! And I tried, twenty minutes ago, just before I left the boarding-house, and the butler said Miss Blair was asleep and not to be disturbed."

"Well, then—"

"Oh, Nora! Nora!" William moaned. "How could she go to a house like that? How could she do any of it?"

Nora considered for an instant and smiled grimly.

"You'll know sooner or later; you may as well know now," she replied. "Consider it a secret; Cyn seemed mighty sensitive about your ever guessing it. But—well, we haven't been making much money and we haven't been eating much lately, Billy, and when a note came from Mrs. Ronalds last night, asking me to call, Cynthia went in my place, because—because she thought they'd ask her to stay to dinner!"

Cold horror swept down upon William; he turned white.

"You're not—not saying that my poor little kid was *hungry?*" he cried.

"Billy, she was darned near starvation!" Nora confessed.

"And I—and I—" William mouthed, wildly. "My Lord! Hasn't any woman any brains? Haven't *you* any brains? Don't you know that I've stuck twelve hundred dollars in the savings bank, this last year, and you two could have had every cent of it, any time? Don't you know I'd go out and steal, to get that kid anything she wanted? Don't you know—"

"I know all about that, Billy," Nora said gently. "But it isn't done, where we come from."

"Then you come from a damn fool place!" William panted. "That's all I've got to say about it! When you'll let a little kid like Cynthia take chances like—"

"I had no idea that she was taking any chances," Nora said briefly; and there was another tense moment, wherein Nora fought an extremely brief battle. "Billy, on the telephone list, over there—a man named Morse. See if there's any one in his office yet, and if there is leave word that I can't be there at nine and I'll be there as soon as I can. And then call up George Carberry and say that I'll be on hand this afternoon, if possible."

"And—"

"And by that time I'll be ready to go and get that confounded young one and bring her home!" Nora concluded, with a shade of bitterness, as she headed toward the bedroom.

"I'm going with you!"

"Not unless you swear to keep your hands off Ronalds and everybody else! I've got too many other things on my mind, to be mixed up in a murder!" the elder Miss Blair snapped, as the door closed.

It was just after nine that Towner admitted them.

Nora looked Towner up and down and found him harmless.

"Miss Blair!" she said briefly. "Say that her cousin and Mr. Brander wish to see her immediately!"

"Well, I—I think, miss, that—" Towner began, his eyes widening behind the glasses, as they settled on William.

"What you think is not of interest!" Nora said, crisply and remarkably. "Say that we are here on most urgent business and that we must see her at once!"

"Well—if the young lady's awake—well, I'll see, of course," Towner muttered. And he glanced about the reception room, plainly estimating the portability of the one or two valuable pieces, and finally decided to take the risk. "If you'll just be seated and wait right here?" he said, dubiously and significantly.

Nora's foot tapped for some little time.

"Nice, cordial welcome they give you here!" she murmured. "He looked as if he thought we were going to leave with the silver."

"It—it's right down there, at the end of that hall, that I saw 'em!" William observed, emotionally and irrelevantly.

Nora went on tapping. Minutes passed. More minutes passed, and somewhere a clock chimed the quarter hour, and still there was no sign of Cynthia—and just then Nora sat up with a jerk.

"Coming! I hear her!" she said. "Now leave this to me; all I want now is to make sure she's all right and start her home with you, inside of five minutes—and then I'll go about my own business and you may spend the rest of your life working out the answers; only—"

"Only it isn't Cyn!" said William. "That's the old lady; I hear her cane."

No statement could have been more accurate than this of William's. It was indeed the old lady, entering now, looking them over with her keen eyes, nodding frostily to William and renewing her inspection of Nora. She seemed entirely satisfied, however; she seated herself with:

"Cynthia's cousin, I believe?"

"Yes, I'm Cynthia's cousin," Nora said briskly. "And I want to see Cynthia."

"Sound asleep," Mrs. Stone smiled. "She didn't get to bed until late, and I told them to let her alone."

"Well, now will you tell 'them' immediately that it is very necessary, indeed, for her to get up and come down here?"

Mrs. Stone raised her heavy brows.

"That has a very dictatorial sound, young woman," she suggested.

"That is what might be called mandatory!" the elder Miss Blair responded, and her fine teeth flashed in a very unpleasant smile. "Something very odd is happening here, and I've come to take Cynthia out of it!"

"Odd?"

"Mr. Brander here says that she's supposed to be engaged to Neville!"

"She is engaged to him."

"She is not!"

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Stone, rather too quietly, "but she *is*. The boy apparently pledged her to secrecy for some reason—he's a curious lad in many respects—but I assure you that Cynthia loves him and is engaged to him."

"*Loves* that—" William exploded.

"I said 'loves him!'" Mrs. Stone responded, with equal force. "I surprised the little minx last night while she was having a private rhapsody over him; I asked her point blank if she did love him and she clasped her hands and looked—well, you probably know how they look—and said she'd die for him! Does that indicate anything?"

Nora's breathing was growing more and more rapid.

"It indicates to me that Cynthia has either gone insane or been drugged," she replied. "She's engaged to Mr. Brander!"

"Oho!" mused the elder lady, without approval or undue excitement. "So it went as far as that, eh? I had a strong suspicion, too, that the little scallywag had been playing with him. Well—too bad, of course, but two of you can't marry her."

"And another thing you seem hardly to grasp is that Cynthia never laid eyes on Neville," the elder Miss Blair pursued.

"My dear young woman, are you assuming that I'm an utter idiot?" Mrs. Stone inquired ominously. "That girl rushed here last night after my daughter had written her a note. She couldn't have taken time to dress, even, or—"

"Well, she didn't have to, because she was all dressed. And the note was for me and not for her, by the way. I've been out three times with your Neville, and where his mother got the impression that I meant to marry him, I can't say. But it was too ridiculous even to answer; I'd have torn it up, but Cynthia—er—thought it ought to be explained."

"In person and by Cynthia and at once, hey?" Mrs. Stone asked, with a faint sneer. "That sounds mighty queer to me."

"However it may sound—"

"Now, as a general thing, when any one's trying to put anything over on me, I can spot it before it's half developed—and smash it!" the lady went on. "But I'm bound to say that you're piling on the nonsense too thick and fast for me; I can't make head or tail of it. *I* know people, you know; I know that Cynthia's exactly the girl Neville would pick to marry; I know he *did* pick her. And I know he's going to marry her, too, by crickey—d'ye get that?" she concluded, grimly. "What all this rambling twaddle of yours means, I can't

say, but we'll get to the bottom of it, pronto! Is that Towner out there? Towner! Call Miss Blair and say that she'll have to dress and come down at once!"

Following this, she tightened her lips and scowled. And Nora tightened her own lips and merely sat and waited, while William mastered himself as best he could and did a good deal of shifting and mumbling, but at least preserved the peace. So more minutes winged their way.

"Beg pardon, madam," said Towner, with an apologetic cough. "But I think the young lady's sleeping very soundly. She doesn't answer my knock."

"Healthy little cuss!" the elder lady chuckled. "Probably take a bomb to wake her. Well? Have you sent Graves in?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Stone. I—"

"Well, send her in! Send her in!"

The butler retreated. The heavy silence resumed sway. Nora's foot tapped on incessantly; like Mrs. Stone, she could make nothing at all of it just yet. The really confusing element was the elderly person's complete assurance, of course. It wasn't—wasn't possible that Cynthia really owned an incredibly secretive strain, was it? It wasn't possible that she really had formed some sort of alliance with Neville? No, it was *not* possible! Nora reddened impatiently at her own thoughts.

On the other hand, it was a trifle farfetched to assume that there was really anything wrong with this family. The old lady was unusual, to be sure, but—oh, well where was Cynthia, anyway? She'd had time now to dress a dozen times over; for Cynthia dressing, at its very slowest, was a swift process.

"Suppose I run upstairs and see what's delaying her?" she suggested, suddenly.

"Suppose you sit right where you are!" snapped Mrs. Stone. "I don't know what fool mess is afoot here, but we'll have it out in the open, young woman. She'll be here when she's ready."

"Here she comes!" William exploded, and bounced from his chair, and at once sat down again with a muttered: "No, that's not Cynthia's step."

"Happens to be my butler's," Mrs. Stone said tartly, as she faced the door. "Well? Did she—well, what the Sam Hill's the matter with *you?*"

There was reason for this question. Most of Towner's ruddy color had faded out. His mouth worked strangely, much as works the mouth of a goldfish about to be fed. His glasses slid from his nose—and were caught again and replaced—and slid once more and were once more recaptured. Towner, in fine, displayed great agitation, and it was only after the third attempt that he managed:

"Er—er as to Miss Blair, ma'am!"

"What?"

"Would you rather—hear this in private, Mrs. Stone?"

"Hey?" cried the master of the house. "Nothin's happened to her?"

"Well, no, ma'am. Not—not strictly speaking. Only she's not in her room."

"Did Graves look?"

"Everywhere in there' ma'am."

"Where is she, then?" Mrs. Stone demanded in utter exasperation. "Haven't you brains enough to find her and ask her to come here."

"Under most circumstances, yes, ma'am," Towner responded, with a touch of acerbity. "Under these circumstances, no, ma'am. It so happens that Miss Blair not only ain't in her room, but she ain't anywhere else in the house!"

"Where—where have you looked?" Mrs. Stone inquired, not so steadily.

"There's not a place we haven't looked, ma'am!"

"In the spare rooms, Towner?"

"In every one of 'em, ma'am!"

"Well, have you looked under beds and —and in closets?"

"All of that, ma'am, and also in the coal cellar. I may say, Mrs. Stone, that I even pushed up the scuttle and took a peek at the roof. She's not there, either."

Some seconds, Jane Stone considered him with parted lips; then the lips came together grimly.

"The little rat!" she muttered. "So she put on her clothes and sneaked out, after all, did she!"

"Well, it would appear that she sneaked out, ma'am," said Towner, "but she didn't put on her clothes first."

"What's that?"

"No, ma'am! Her clothes are all in Graves's room at this minute!" the butler said brightly.

CHAPTER XVI.

AND MORE OF IT.

A LOW roar came from William Brander; he rose, hands working. Nora caught him and dragged him back.

"You're absurd, of course, Towner!" she said. "She couldn't have left the house without—"

"She had a bathrobe and slippers, miss," the butler interrupted.

"Well, she didn't leave in them, either!" Nora snapped. "She's somewhere about the house!"

"Anything's possible, miss," sighed Towner, and he seemed easier, now that the confession had been made. "But I've been over the place, almost by inches, as you might say, this last twenty minutes, and Graves and the two maids with me. If there's a place we ain't looked, it might be you could find it, miss, but I can't tell you where it is."

"If he's looked, he's looked. That settles it! Towner knows the house," said Mrs. Stone. "Wasn't the door bolted when you come down this morning?"

"No, ma'am, it wasn't," sighed Towner. "I didn't bolt it when Mr. Dale—er—came back again, and I was with him till near five, he was suffering so excruciating. It being so near daylight, I didn't lock up again. She—she could have slipped out without making a sound and—"

"Well, wait! Wait!" came from the tight throat of William Brander. "Where's the little fellow with the trick black mustache? I want to see *him* about this! I just want to—to ask him a couple of questions! Where is he?"

"That 'll be Mr. Dale?" Towner smiled sadly. "He's indisposed this morning, sir. He had a slight accident. He's in his room, locked in."

"Did you search *his* room thoroughly, by the way?" Mrs. Stone demanded, sharply.

"*His* room?" William cried. "What—what do you dare to mean by that, madam?"

"I'm asking my servant a question! This is my house, and I'll attend to this matter in my own fashion!" the lady stated. "*Did* you?"

"I did, ma'am!"

"All right! I'll go search it, too!" William added. "And if he's—where is this room?"

"Billy dear!" Nora said, with remarkable calm. "Just contain yourself for a moment and let me ask a question: who is Graves?"

"My maid, of course."

"Well, why did she have Cynthia's clothes in her room?"

"How the devil do I know?" Mrs. Stone demanded. "Towner, send Graves here at once!"

And now, from the corridor, there came a sniff, and immediately following this sniff came Graves herself. Her eye was bright and hard, and her mouth as tight as ever.

"I was waiting to be summoned, ma'am!" she stated.

"Well?"

"I'm to speak out, as to the young person's clothes?" inquired Graves, with a glance at the visitors.

"Speak out, of course! Tell everything you know!" her mistress roared, with a peculiar choking effect remarkably unlike her normal deep voice. "What d'ye think I'm trying to do here—conceal the girl's body? I want to know where she is! I want to know why you took her clothes!"

Graves nodded and folded her lean hands.

"Well, I took them away from her, ma'am, to save your silverware from being carried out of this house!" said she.

"Hey?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! She was roaming about, all unbeknownst to you, Mrs. Stone, looking things over. And once I got her to bed, I took her clothes without her permission and hid them in my own room."

"Well, you blithering—"

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Stone, but I don't see how you can well call me a fool for doing it!" Graves interrupted, with con-

siderable heat. "After her stealing your diamond pin in the earlier evening—"

"After her doing what?" Nora gasped.

"She stole it, indeed!" said Graves. "I took it out of her pocket myself. Mrs. Stone will bear me out in that!"

"Say! I told you—" that lady began, with great difficulty.

"You told me to speak out, ma'am! I've done so!"

"And you—you dare—you lean, leering, hypocritical—hypocritical scum!" William Brander raved. "You dare—to say that Miss Blair *stole?*"

"I dare say it because it's the truth, and there's no call for honest people to be afraid of the truth! And I say that if I hadn't stopped her, she'd have had the silverware out of the house as well!"

"And it would have gone to you, young fellow!" Towner said unexpectedly. "For I take it you were waiting outside for it and—and I don't just know what you're doing here now."

"Well—" gurgled William. "Well—I—I'll put those words down your throat for a starter and then—then I'll go through this house and—"

"Bill!" breathed Nora, so compellingly, with such amazing calm that William subsided, trembling, dazed. "Er—Mrs. Stone," she pursued, almost sweetly, "may I use your phone? I hadn't expected to be delayed here."

"Use it! Use it! Show her where it is, Towner!" the head of the house grunted. "Graves, you're certain the girl didn't ring for you?"

"I haven't closed my eyes since night before last."

"She'd been abed?"

"I put her there. I'd say she hadn't slept there. The covers was hardly mussed," said the maid.

Mrs. Stone frowned more heavily.

"That skin of hers is used to a good daily scrub, isn't it?" she muttered. "Had she taken a morning bath?"

"She had not, ma'am," said Graves. "I looked. She hadn't even combed her hair."

"You searched the house with Towner, did you?"

"Every inch of it, ma'am. And now would you be so good as to look over your own jewelry, Mrs. Stone? That was a rare light-footed one, that young person, and with what she could have found in your room she'd have been well repaid for leaving just as she was and—"

The elder lady was not even listening. Large lips pursed, she glowered at the hands clasped on her cane. She looked up darkly, just as Nora returned.

"Towner, by the way!" she said, quite casually. "Get Mr. Forbes's office and tell him I want to see him at *once*, will you? Well?"

"Thank you so much. I—I got the man I wanted to catch," Nora said rather jerkily. "Have you—er—thought of anything that might explain Cynthia's absence?"

"Haven't thought of a thing," Mrs. Stone reported gloomily. "Child evidently left the house in her bathrobe!"

"And where did she go *then*," William cried, agonizedly.

"How can I—"

"And *why* did she go?" Nora inquired, and her own calm seemed to be breaking down now. "What happened here to frighten Cynthia so that she fled in the middle of the night like that?"

Mrs. Stone scowled at her for, perhaps, one-fiftieth of one second, and at once scowled at the ceiling.

"Frighten her?" she grunted. "What should happen here to frighten her? Nothing!"

"I don't like the way you say that!" Nora cried, keenly.

"Huh? How do you want me to say it?"

"I mean that you know something—you're withholding something. Was Cynthia at all—well, irrational?"

"My soul! Does she have irrational spells?"

"She's never had one yet. She might have one under sufficient provocation. Well?"

Mrs. Stone sighed and shook her head.

"Didn't have one around here; never saw a saner woman in my life," she replied.

"Then let me say that I know Cynthia well enough to *know* that she never left this house in a bathrobe without first hav-

ing been driven positively insane! If nothing like that occurred, she's still here, and I mean to search the place from cellar to garret. You hear? And if I find that you've been concealing her and—"

"Of course I hear! Go ahead and search it!" Mrs. Stone cried, very violently. "Rip up the carpets and take an ax to the piano, if you like! I don't give a continental damn what you do, so that you find her! Drat you, anyway! I'm not an abductor of young girls! I'm as anxious to know what's become of her as you are. She's the only one I ever met that I wanted to see married to my grandson," the lady concluded more mildly.

It may be admitted that Nora hesitated in what had promised to be a wild and spectacular dash through the premises. She stared hard at the elderly lady, and the latter stared back at Nora just as steadily, and in her deep-set eyes there was a concern which certainly appeared genuine. This staring process she interrupted to glare at Graves with:

"Well, what are *you* standing around for? Go ask Mrs. Ronalds if she knows anything about this affair!"

"I can tell you that she doesn't, ma'am," Graves responded! "I spoke to her a few moments ago, while we were searching; she's quite distracted."

"Aha?" grunted the head of the house. "Find Mrs. Dale, then!"

"Well, Mrs. Dale's right here, ma'am, if you please."

"Yes, indeed; Mrs. Dale has been standing here in the door for several minutes," the lady herself supplied brightly, as she entered. "There seems to be quite an excitement?"

A peculiarly eager and intelligent light shone in her eye just now—a light which Mrs. Stone observed with a perplexed frown and Nora studied with more than a little curiosity. Even to a stranger, this light denoted somehow that, however greatly perturbed the rest of them might be, Mrs. Dale was finding a real pleasure in life.

William Brander, however, found no pleasure in Mrs. Dale. He started up with a sharp:

"You're *his* wife, are you? Say! I want to tell you a thing or two about your husband, and then I want to go with you and talk to him and—and just see if he'll deny them, you know. I've a mighty strong notion that he knows more about—"

"About this mysterious disappearance of his—of Miss Blair?" the young wife asked, quite airily.

"Yes!"

"Your notion's all wrong, then," Mrs. Dale laughed slightly. "Tom doesn't know a thing about it. And he can't see you in any case. He's ill."

"Yes, I know he is!" William laughed savagely. "I—well, I just want to see him and—"

"Impossible just now, as I've told you," Mrs. Dale smiled faintly, and turned from him with a shrug. "Er—grandmother dear."

"What?" her grandmother asked sourly.

"You're still wondering what became of Miss Blair?"

"We feel a certain mild interest in the subject. Why?"

"Why didn't you ask *me*, then?"

"All right! I ask you. Do you know anything about it?"

Here came what impressed Nora oddly enough as a bit of acting—and of not particularly good acting, at that. Mrs. Dale started slightly and permitted her large blue eyes to wander over the gathering for a moment; then indecision came visibly to Mrs. Dale. She had been about to speak—and now she hesitated. She smiled, in a gentle, almost kindly way; she looked down at her hands. And finally she sighed and faced her grandmother once more.

"I—why, yes, I suppose I do," she said, "but—"

"But what?"

"Well, *you* seemed to like her, grandmother, and mother seemed to like her and—oh, I think it's better to say nothing at all about it, after all. We'll just say—well, suppose we just say that I *know* she's gone!"

Mrs. Stone shifted about and studied her intently.

"Why all the kittenish effect?" she demanded.

"Oh—it isn't a life and death matter, in

any case. I shouldn't have said anything about it in the first place."

"Well, since you did, how do you know she's gone?" Mrs. Stone barked. "Or do you know anything at all about it?"

Her granddaughter's chin came up quite angrily.

"You mean you're quite sure that I do not? Well, I assure you that I have every cause to *know* that the girl is missing! My sable coat went with her when she departed!"

"Hey?" gasped Mrs. Stone.

"Twenty-four thousand dollars' worth of fur, which you gave me, grandma, and one of my hats as well—yes!" Mrs. Dale said.

"You're — you're — you're saying that Cynthia stole your clothes?" William cried, quite madly.

The young wife sneered at him.

"You're frightfully noisy, aren't you—whoever you are?" she observed. "Yes, I did mean to suggest that idea. Either that or the coat took to walking of its own accord, which it has never done before."

"But—why—"

"I put it back in my closet, you know, and then I went in with mother," Mrs. Dale pursued, ignoring him. "This morning it was gone and—well, here's the handkerchief I picked up on my floor. The 'C. B.' is big enough, in all conscience. Was it one of hers?"

She held up the little square. Nora nodded.

"Yes, I did a dozen of them for her last Christmas!" she said.

"Well, that—that's clew enough in a way," Mrs. Stone said hoarsely.

"Do you regard it as that?" laughed Mrs. Dale. "I didn't. It was too obvious, lying there in the middle of the room. I took it rather as a receipt for my coat—or a bit of defiance, perhaps."

Nora gulped at the tight dryness in her throat.

"If Cynthia actually did take your coat, she was out of her mind," she began. "I've—"

"Take it! Take it! She never took it!" William vociferated. "It's all bunk! It's a lie, I tell you! That little kid's so innocent, so white, so—"

"So *what?*" Mrs. Dale laughed in loud astonishment. "Well, really I'm afraid you're not very well acquainted with the little kid, as you call her. She was coming out of my husband's room—all white and innocent, of course—in her bathrobe, when I caught her this morning, earlier!"

"Oh—you—you—" William gasped, and his hands clutched in the general direction of the lady, who laughed in his face. "I—can't kill you, because you're a woman. But if you'll let your husband breathe just one word of that filthy lie—if you'll let any man—"

"Oh, but you have my assurance that it's the simple truth!" Mrs. Dale laughed again. "You see—"

"Dora!" croaked her grandmother.

"Er—yes!"

"*Dry up!*" pursued Mrs. Stone with swiftly gathering force. "Stop making that confounded boy yell his lungs out! Stop talking, d'ye hear?—and that applies to all of you. Let *me* talk for a while!"

She ended in quite a rush of sound. She waited, eyes glittering, through five still seconds.

"There's a perfectly simple explanation to all this!" she snapped. "*I* know people! I know that girl, and she's everything she ought to be, d'ye hear? If she's not as sweet and good as she looks and acts, if she's not head over ears in love with Neville and secretly engaged to him, I'm going to have myself put under restraint in a home somewhere and a commission appointed to look after my affairs—because it means that senile decay's shot me all to blazes! Tah! Now control yourselves and listen and I'll tell you *exactly* what has happened!"

They waited quite breathlessly, even to William.

"The long and the short of it is that the young one, Cynthia, was scared! I—er—don't know what scared her or how badly she was scared; but I *do* know that she thought it all over and then decided to fly straight to the one logical protector—Neville! Hah! You look quite astonished, don't you? I'm the only one in this house that ever thought in a straight line for more than thirty seconds! However, that's apart. Next! This jackfool of a maid of

mine had stolen her clothes. When the panic hit Cynthia she hunted up the nearest thing that would cover her nakedness till she could find a taxi, and it happened to be Dora's coat. Long before this, she's found him, or she'd be back here—or she'd be at her own home. Well?" Mrs. Stone smiled, acidly. "There's some logic for you to chew on, hey? Towner! Come here, Towner! Call up Mortimer Lester's home; Mr. Neville's gone duck shooting with Lester's boy. Find out exactly where Mr. Neville is, and say that it's vital for me to get in touch with him at once! And when Neville calls up, I'll tell you just where your Cynthia is!" she concluded, grimly.

Her teeth shut together, with the click of a rat trap. Breathing hard, muttering, she glared at them; and the murmur of Towner's voice floated back for a little—and then Towner himself reappeared.

"Er—there must have been some mistake, ma'am," he reported. "I could only get the caretaker. The whole family—yes, ma'am, the boy as well; I asked particular—they went to South America near three weeks ago!"

"The Lesters?"

"The Mortimer Lesters, ma'am," said Towner.

"Well, that—that's a funny one!" the lady observed thickly, amazedly. "I can't understand—what's wrong with *her?*"

For Nora had leaped fom her chair and all but hurled herself upon the window which looked upon the street; if none of the others had heard the big maroon closed car as it stopped, Nora had heard! And now Nora whirled back upon the gathering, a different being. Color had blazed up under her dark skin; there was a very emotional crack in the voice which cried:

"Oh, here's Uncle Dan at last!"

CHAPTER XVII.

UNCLE.

JANE STONE was indeed a woman of iron; yet even iron will not endure prolonged strain beyond a certain limit. There is no denying that Mrs. Stone executed a very visible start and that the gaze she turned upon the elder Miss Blair held something not so very unlike terror!

"Well, who the devil is Uncle Dan?" she inquired bluntly.

"He's my uncle—that's who he is!" Nora cried. "He's my mother's elder brother, and he's a man and he's here to find out—"

"You sent for him?"

"I certainly did!"

"Well, now that he's here, I guess we won't admit him," Mrs. Stone rasped, wearily. "We've got plenty of turmoil as it is, without ringing in any Uncle Dans. Towner! Don't open that door."

Nora's laugh was a shrill and remarkable thing.

"No, don't, Towner! Don't!" she cried 'But *if* you don't I'm going to throw this chair through that window and scream until—"

"You needn't bother with anything like that, Nora," William interrupted, and rose briskly and flexed his biceps. "I'll knock Towner cold and let your uncle in myself! It 'll be a pleasure! I've got to soak somebody around here or bust!"

"Well, wait—wait!" Mrs. Stone managed. "Don't do that, you—young maniac! I've—er—reconsidered. You may admit him, Towner."

The agitated butler caught his glasses in the act of dropping, nodded hasty assent and disappeared; and his own rather gusty voice floated back and then a peculiar monotone, and Towner announced:

"Mr. Daniel Girton!"

And from Nora Blair there came one gasping little cry and she bounded across the room; and now her distressed face was buried upon a lean gray shoulder and over her own shoulder the cold, very pale eyes of Mr. Girton surveyed the company, resting a moment upon one and a moment upon the next, yet even in these moments giving a weird impression of having extracted, to his complete satisfaction, the innermost secrets of each soul!

More than his eyes compelled attention to Mr. Girton, too. He was a man, apparently, in the middle fifties, of medium height and rather spare anatomy; his raiment was of the most conservative and in-

conspicuous variety; his dark countenance was almost anything else. Mr. Girton's cheekbones were high and his nose very thin and intelligent and his mouth grim and unyielding. He might have been the fabled master of the world's finance or the one mathematically perfect certified accountant in the country. Given Dominican robe and tonsure, and he would have adorned any inquisitional chamber—or, in neat Puritan knickers and hat, it would have taken no effort at all to visualize him as burning witches through an entire day without ever altering a single muscle of his face. At all events, now that he was among those present, Mrs. Stone no longer had a monopoly on the supply of strong and positive character in that home.

He patted Nora's shoulder quietly as that young woman stood erect and essayed:

"Mrs.—Mrs. Stone—and Mrs. Dale, my uncle. You've met Billy and—you—you know me and—"

"Has Cynthia been found?" her uncle asked, after two extremely brief bows.

"Not yet!"

"Give me the facts," said Cynthia's uncle, in his strange, still voice, which seemed never to go up or down.

Nora drew one deep breath and talked, swiftly, tumultuously, even. Mrs. Dale, after the first minute or so, also talked; and presently William Brander was putting in an occasional view of his own, with much force and less coherence. Mr. Girton merely listened. There was a pause when Mrs. Ronalds entered, wringing her hands, unable longer to remain away. Mr. Girton considered Cornelia for just one second and dismissed her. The talking was resumed.

But Mrs. Stone had no part in all this gabbling! Mrs. Stone sat, hands folded on her cane, and studied the newcomer, and the longer she studied him, the less she liked him. She loathed all these silent, self-contained beings in the first place; specifically, she had no warm appreciation for the frosty, quizzical glance this one directed at herself, every now and then. If this was *the* Daniel Girton—and he certainly looked as if he was *the* something or other—she had heard of him, of course, and that in itself was not cheering or—oh, he had stopped all the monkey chattering by holding up his damned skinny hand, hadn't he?

More, although he seemed to be addressing Nora, he was still looking directly at Mrs. Stone.

"You have unfolded a remarkable situation, my dear," said he. "Virtually, all of your information is inaccurate, I think. Permit me to question Mrs. Stone for a moment. Madam, exactly what have you done with my niece?"

"What d'ye think I've done with her? Eaten her?" the lady cried fiercely. "I haven't done anything with her! She's going to marry my grandson and somehow or other she got the fool notion of running to him; she took my granddaughter's coat and went and joined him, and wherever he is, she is! There's your whole remarkable situation! I haven't done anything with her!"

The merest suggestion of an impatient sigh escaped Mr. Girton.

"You appreciate, madam, that certain extremely sinister aspects of this matter render candor on your part, at this stage, most advisable?" the still voice inquired.

"What sinister aspects? Damn sinister aspects! There aren't any!" Mrs. Stone responded, more stormily. "And have done with your implications—d'ye hear? This fool girl left of her own accord, because she wanted to go. She's of age, isn't she? I couldn't—er—have kept her here if I'd wanted to, could I? One doesn't ordinarily sit up all night to watch one's guests, does one?"

Mr. Girton considered her with rather the eye of a vivisectionist and nodded.

"Pure bluster, which tells at least some of its own story," he commented. "Madam, I have no hesitation now in placing the blame for Cynthia's disappearance directly upon yourself. Once more—and this, by the way, is for the last time—I ask you: what have you done with Cynthia Blair?"

"Well, once more—and, by crickey, this is for the last time, too! I tell you that I know nothing about her!" the lady roared. "I wish I'd never laid eyes on her till the brat married her and had the responsibility of her! And don't try to intimidate me with that fishy stare, either, Girton! I'm not the breed that can be intimidated!

You've heard all we know ourselves about the girl and now, by the piper that played before Moses, I tell you—"

Mrs. Stone ended in a puff. Mr. Girton was not even listening. He stepped to the corridor and, some ten seconds, surveyed the house. He returned with another definite conclusion:

"Cynthia, if here and alive, would have made herself heard before this, Nora. She has been taken elsewhere and I think, to no great distance. We will go now—"

"*Go?*" Nora gasped.

"Yes, this is in my hands now," Mr. Girton said, rather annoyedly. "I wish you and Brander to canvass Cynthia's personal friends and possible business acquaintances in the next hour or two, and make quite certain that I am not wrong. You can do nothing here. Mrs. Stone!"

"*What?*" growled that lady, from the corner of her mouth.

"I shall return at twelve noon. If at that time Cynthia is delivered to me, absolutely unharmed and vindicated to the last particular, any action against you will be at Cynthia's own discretion. If at that time Cynthia is *not* delivered to me," said Mr. Girton, and paused effectively and smiled a very small and evil smile directly into Mrs. Stone's inner consciousness, "t..en —*God help you!*"

"You infernal, frozen freak of nature!" Mrs. Girton exploded. "You dare to threaten me—*me?* Stop right there in your tracks and listen to me!"

"But I don't choose to listen to you," Mr. Girton responded, with an infinitesimal bow, as he made for the door. "Come, Nora. Come along, Brander."

He was actually going, too, in perfectly flat defiance of the command, and the others were trailing after him.

The door closed on them. There was a fainter click, as the automobile door closed as well, and the soft whirring of a motor. Mrs. Stone sank back, with a long, strange, rumbling, puffing sound, while her daughter clasped her hands and wept freely and her granddaughter gazed at both of them in a curiously subdued way.

"That — that fish-eyed, bedevilled —" Mrs. Stone began, with great difficulty. "He—he *dared* threaten me! He—well, by the mighty! What's Towner doing with that door? Towner!"

"Pardon me, ma'am," the butler sighed. "It's just Mr. Forbes arriving."

"Hey? Forbes? Is he here?" cried the lady, and rose again, hope flaring suddenly in her eyes. "Well, it's near time he got here! I—Forbes! I—good Lord, but I'm glad to see you!"

"Thanks," Mr. Forbes smiled cheerily. "Was that—"

"You come along to my private quarters, Forbes," said Mrs. Stone, and laid a heavy hand on his arm. "I've got a lot to tell you this morning! Come on! Come!"

The lawyer glanced at Cornelia and her more or less interesting daughter, and sighed and forbore queries or comments until the door of the big, square sitting room had closed; but then he asked eagerly:

"By the way, Mrs. Stone, wasn't that Daniel Girton who went out of here a moment before I came in?"

"Hey? Yes!"

"Didn't know you knew him. *There's* a man whose business I want!" pursued Mr. Forbes, enthusiastically. "There's a man who'll be so rich and so much of a power in another ten years that he'll be worth a young fortune annually to any law firm! One of the most remarkable men that ever lived; don't you think so?"

"I noticed he was remarkable in some respects," Mrs. Stone grunted drearily.

"Hear so much about him down town, these days," Mr. Forbes continued, crossing his legs. "He was a small, upstate business man until eight years ago—relatively small, that is; he owned two or three banks and a couple of big factories. They say that he wouldn't leave his mother, because all the other children had married and gone away, and his mother wouldn't leave the home town. Only love Girton ever knew, I understand, and it was a consuming one. Anyhow, his old mother died at last and Girton sold out everything and came down here to get at what he considered his life job. About the time he hit the Street and began to work out a few of his ideas, they tell me, there was a general impression that some one had untied a Japanese earthquake

and turned it loose! Ha! ha! ha! Why, I heard only day before yesterday that—"

"I don't give a hoot about what you heard day before yesterday," his client barked. "I didn't get you here to recite Girton's biography, Forbes. I got you here to listen to me and advise me. Now listen; I'm paying you to listen!"

It was now past ten o'clock.

Philip Forbes knew the whole truth, for he had indeed listened. Nor was he quite the same breezy, smiling lawyer who had begun to listen.

"There! You've heard it all; there's nothing more to tell you!" Mrs Stone concluded.

"There couldn't be, very well!" Mr. Forbes muttered.

"All right! What do you think of it?"

"Perfect candor, Mrs. Stone?"

"Absolutely, Forbes!"

"Well, in that case," the lawyer smiled sadly, "I think you've spilled the beans this time in good earnest, my dear lady. I think you've terrorized your family and friends for so many years and done so many —er—unusual things by purely strong-arm methods that an impression has become fixed in your brain, to the general effect that nothing could possibly slip, once you'd laid hands on it and begun to twist!"

"Aha?" Mrs. Stone smiled grimly.

"And on this astonishing occasion, something slipped badly. I think you've done an outrageous thing, for which there was not the shadow of an excuse."

"There wasn't what?" the lady snapped, bitterly. "Say, if you'd actually seen and talked to that pretty young one and realized just how much peace her marrying Neville's going to bring to me—"

"Even so, one doesn't rap 'em on the head with a stone club and haul 'em into the family, these days, you know. Another thing, I'm half inclined to believe you were wrong in the beginning and that this wasn't the girl Neville's been after!"

"Well, *you* found her and identified and started all this trouble!" the client said, vigorously. "Oh, no, Forbes, you can't make me believe that until I see 'em both side by side and hear 'em both deny it. Blast it! *I* know people, Forbes! I was a girl myself once, if it comes to that. Why the devil should she tell me in so many words that she'd die for the boy if she wasn't in love with him?"

"That, I'll admit, is beyond me."

"Let's get at something that isn't beyond you, then! I may have let my peculiar gifts run away with me, under the influence of that young one's charm. But I'm not a defective. I know well enough that the truth will come out, sooner or later. But if—er—it doesn't come out soon enough, what can this Girton do to me—anything?"

"Anything?" the lawyer gasped. "Heavenly day, what *can't* he do to you?"

"Civil suits—all that—yes, maybe," Mrs Stone said, not so forcefully. "What I meant was—er—anything in the way of criminal proceedings?"

Mr. Forbes smiled very grimly.

"My partner's the criminal specialist in our office, you know; I'll have to talk to him before I can give you a really full and authentic bill of all the possibilities. Offhand, I should say that imprisoning the girl here might have some pretty definite consequences. Then again, the matter of deliberately conspiring to accuse her falsely of larceny and definitely threatening to ruin her life—of course, there may be a jury somewhere on earth tolerant enough to feel that this was quite justified, but—"

"Don't bother to be facetious!"

"I'm not. Let's look at the other side of it. You can stick to your story of the lace-pin, I mean, and we can stress the fact that the girl selected Mrs. Dale's coat to disappear in and—"

"Hold on a second!" cried Mrs. Stone. "I'd forgotten this, but—but last night, when I asked why she was roving about the house, she—she grinned straight at me and told me she was on her way to steal—"

"Steal what?"

"I dunno, Forbes. Something happened just then and she never finished the sentence."

"Well, then, perhaps she really is a little crook," the lawyer muttered. "That might help some."

"Some? It'd help a lot, wouldn't it?" Mrs. Stone demanded.

"Ordinarily, yes. In this case, it may not even be of importance," said the lawyer, with the same sad smile. "What strikes me as the most vital thing in connection with this girl is that she's Daniel Girton's niece. And that man's a very peculiar brand of holy terror, I've heard—almost a stranger to his whole family most of the time, that is; but when anything like an emergency arises—"

"The devil himself, eh?" Mrs. Stone grunted. "I'm not interested in him! What I want to know is *what to do?*"

The lawyer leaned back and regarded her steadily.

"The very best piece of advice I can give you is: have the girl ready for him at noon!" said he.

"Well, how in—" the lady began, thunderously.

"Very well, then; you really don't know where she's gone," Mr. Forbes murmured, and frowned heavily. "We might take the one chance in a thousand, if you like, turn loose all the agency detectives I can hire and have them comb as much of the town as possible between now and noon, if you want to spend the money."

"How much!" asked Mrs. Stone, and reached toward her desk.

"Oh—four or five thousand dollars, perhaps. I may be able to get three or four hundred men into motion by telephone and I presume they'll charge up for a full day at ten or twelve dollars."

Mrs. Stone was writing, even then. She poked a check at Mr. Forbes.

"Don't fold it till it's dry," she sighed. "Now—"

"Well, so long as I'm going to get at this, I'll get at it," the lawyer remarked rising. "Now—as to yourself."

"Yes! That's what I want to know!"

"Did Girton promise anything definite in the way of revenge?"

"He did not."

"Umum. Well, I'm not intimately acquainted with him, of course, and I may be a rotten guesser, but if I had a spare twenty thousand, Mrs. Stone, I'd cheerfully put it on this five thousand of yours as odds that before this Girton has secured warrants for your arrest and, probably, Mrs. Ronalds's and Dora's!"

"*What?*" shrieked his client.

"I may be all wrong about that. Perhaps it's just a mistaken personal opinion, Mrs. Stone. But you wanted advice and —er—I meant to base my advice on that promise."

"And—"

"All three of you get out before twelve o'clock!" said Phillip Forbes. "Don't sit around thinking it over. *Git!*"

"Git where?" Mrs. Stone said hoarsely.

"How much cash have you got in the house?"

"Not more than a hundred or so."

"Luckily, I'm carrying about three hundred myself this morning," the attorney said, briskly, and emptied his wallet on her desk. "That'll take you three to Grinnell Furnace, and there's an eleven-twenty train out of Grand Central, too!"

"Where'll it carry us, Forbes?" the lady's husky voice inquired.

"Grinnell Furnace—an abandoned mine that busted my second cousin and cost me about twenty-five hundred, year before last. It's up in the northern part of Ontario, you know. You'll get to the end of the branch line—place called Latoine—about ten tomorrow night and the station agent will put you up; he knows me and I'll wire him. Then he'll find you a team and get a message through to Rene Fournier—chap who has charge of the remains, you know. It's about eighteen hours drive in from Latoine to the Furnace. You'll stay with Fournier and his family, of course, and you'll find everything clean as a pin and the food—er—as good as one could expect. The main consideration is that, once you're at the Furnace, you're safe. They'll never find you till you get ready to come out."

"And—and you mean to tell me that I'm to take my daughter and her daughter and run like a scared rabbit for this God-forsaken hole-in-the-wall simply because this man Girton tried to bluff me?"

"Put it that way, if you like."

"Well, I'll see him in hell first!" Jane Stone cried. "D'ye hear? I'll see him in hell first!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

At Trail's End

By L. PAUL

THE January sun was shining coldly on the pavement as Whitey Wilkins paused at the steps of his East Side tenement home. Twenty years old was Whitey, small, stunted, insignificant to look upon, but ambitious. If he devoted his time and attention to it, thought Whitey, he might one day become a real gunman, even a gang leader, respected and feared, with the power of life and death over his subjects. Such a gangster, perhaps, as Butch Herkimer, yonder, slouching in the dark shadows of the alley down the street, Butch who could count on the loyalty of twenty henchmen.

Such was Whitey's ambition, and already he wore beneath his armpit, in a smooth leather holster, an automatic. He touched the bulge lightly as he stood there. It seemed to him the token of manhood.

Mr. Butch Herkimer was also thinking thoughts at his post of vantage down the street where the dark shadows of the alley half hid him. Nor were they pleasant thoughts. This young Whitey kid was getting a bit fresh, might need disciplining. Besides, there was the matter of Mary Carney, young, fair, and like all young ladies of the vicinity possessed of her share of the devilment that drives the lads distracted.

Butch Herkimer also had a bulge under his left arm, but being a master of his craft he did not betray the fact by any amateurish fumblings. Instead he stood with hands hanging limp, seemingly inert, at his side.

Mary Carney, with the proverbial tendency of the idle, slid open her window one flight up and, looking out to see what mischief she might do, spotted the lurking gangster down the street and dropped her handkerchief at the feet of Whitey Wilkins. Then, smiling pleasantly, she waited for her big medicine to work.

Several hundred miles north of New York, where the spruce forest came down to Lost Canoe River, Big Bateese, the Canuck trapper, sat in his cabin staring sadly at a long still form beneath a blanket.

Big Bateese had heard vaguely of a village called New York; quite superior in size, if rumor were true, to the small frontier towns he had known, but Mary Carney and the two gentlemen now under her keen observation were beyond big Bateese's ken entirely.

And yet that small square of linen fluttering downward from Miss Carney's hand was destined to change all this.

For, as Whitey Wilkins smirking with pleasure bent to pick it up, Butch Herkimer loosening the buttons of his overcoat slouched out of the alley and headed for him.

"Gettin' too flip," decided Butch. "Got to put my mark on that moll or every rat on the East Side'll be after her. As for this runt—" and he scowled at Whitey Wilkins now engaged in pleasant conversation with the lady in the case.

Mary Carney, though seeing him come, was not yet ready to drop the minnow for the whale.

"And were you thinking of going to the dance to-night, Mr. Wilkins?" said she.

"I can answer that," Butch Herkimer confronted his runt of a rival. "He ain't."

"And why not?" asked Mary Carney tossing her head. As for Whitey Wilkins, he gulped once, and then, because deep down in him was a spark of courage, he reached for his gun.

Before his hands touched it where it lay in the holster he was staring into the muzzle of its fellow in Butch's hand. Butch Herkimer left nothing to chance, which explained his survival in the precarious career he had made his own.

"He ain't dancin'—not with you," said Butch Herkimer. "And what's more, you runt, if I catch you hangin' round my skirt—well, you'll take a long journey. Get me?"

"Aw, who's hangin' round her," Whitey backed away.

"Beat it." Butch Herkimer wasted no further words on his defeated rival. "Now you," he lifted his face toward the window above, "unless you like funerals, leave these birds alone. You're mine, get me?"

"Indeed and I'm not," began Miss Carney, in lively protest, but something in Butch's eye stopped her. "At least I was only fooling."

"You'll fool some one into a hearse, you will!" said Butch, his hands swiftly thrusting his automatic back into concealment. "You're mine, and me, I'll do the picking of your boy friends."

And that was that.

But ten days later, when the orchestra was blaring away at Joe the Greek's dance hall, Mary Carney, believing Butch Herkimer to be elsewhere practicing his profession, yielded to the lure of forbidden fruit, swept her long-lashed eyes over Whitey Wilkins as he stood near at hand and put the come-hither on him.

Followed one dance, then another, and in the end trouble in heaps. Not that any one outside the secret knew. Nothing rough occurred in Joe's dance hall. But a dapper young man stepped up to the pair of them as they slowly revolved in some intricate movement of the dance and whispered from the corner of his mouth. What he said sent Mary Carney home, and drove a badly frightened Whitey Wilkins out into the night. What he said was brief and to the point, being just five words—

"Butch Herkimer is after you."

Whitey knew what that meant. He had been warned. He had disregarded that warning. Now Butch and twenty odd disciples of the gun were on his trail. Sooner or later, if he stayed in New York there would come a flash from a passing car or a burst of flame from a dark doorway, and that would be the end of him. Butch Herkimer's gang got their man.

If he stayed in New York! As he dived like a rabbit into a taxi at the door, Whitey Wilkins grasped the one bit of hope. "Grand Central" he cried, and the chauffeur threw in his clutch. A crack outside, a crash of breaking glass, and Whitey Wilkins was staring at a shattered window beside him. Butch's gang was working quickly, even for them.

But they had missed, and if he could make the station, get aboard a train, slip across the nearest border, he might elude them. He was too wise in their ways to seek other avenues of escape than flight. Fumbling in his pockets he found his total

resources small indeed, a scant sixty dollars. By the time he had counted it the taxi was pausing at the entrance to the station.

Whitey slipped a bill to the chauffeur, scuttled across the sidewalk, and made for the ticket sellers.

"Where to?" asked the man behind the grille.

"North." Whitey glanced nervously over his shoulder. None of Butch's gang in sight yet; he must have shaken them.

"North ain't no place," the ticket clerk grumbled. "Where to?"

"Montreal. When's the next train."

"Two minutes." The clerk slid out a ticket and made change. "Goin' north for a drink?"

"Like hell!" Whitey grabbed the ticket and change and ran headlong for the gates.

He slipped through to the platform. The gates clashed behind him. A big policeman standing outside eyed him speculatively. And then he saw another figure stepping swiftly, noiselessly along. It was Butch himself. Butch the leader of the gang, Butch with one hand under his coat.

Whitey Wilkins turned and ran for his train. Butch Herkimer pressed his face against the closed gates.

"Looking for some one?" asked the policeman.

"I was," Butch snarled.

"Too late now," the policeman comforted him. "You missed him."

"'Too late' ain't next time." Butch turned away.

The train gathering speed was disappearing.

Hours later Whitey Wilkins came out of the Bonaventure Station at Montreal. He was still scared, still apprehensive. As he climbed up Windsor Street he glanced fearfully at every strange face.

Halfway up stood Windsor Station. A stream of passengers was pouring out. Standing by the curb a young man with felt hat pulled over his eyes was watching them. With a start Whitey Wilkins recognized him as Gyp Thoms, Butch's chief lieutenant. Fool that he was to forget it. Not a man on the East Side but had heard where Butch's lieutenant was hiding out until a certain fuss at home blew over.

He stopped dead. Gyp had not seen him, busy as he was with the stream of passengers. A hurrying telegraph messenger bumping into Whitey, throwing him off his balance, suggested an explanation.

"He's wired Gyp. This town ain't safe." Whitey recovered his balance, pulled himself together, and turned again down hill.

He circled the station, slipped in at another door, and accosted the ticket clerk.

"When's the next train north?" he asked.

"Two hours. Where to?"

"How far's she go?"

"Right to the end of steel up in the Laurentians—to Allouette."

"Gimme a ticket. An' say—any place a guy can take a sleep?"

"This isn't a hotel," the ticket agent grunted.

Whitey Wilkins turned away clutching a ticket for Allouette, at the end of the line that led north.

He eyed the great waiting room apprehensively. Few people were about. It looked empty, afforded scant cover. But outside in the concourse hurrying folk were moving to and fro. He slipped out and plunged into the living stream.

A vaulted passageway broke the wall of the concourse. A big sign caught his eye:

TO THE WASH ROOMS.

He slipped across the stream of pedestrians, dived into the passage, and descended a flight of stairs. An attendant on duty was standing there. Another sign bore the word:

BATHS.

"Gimme one," quavered Whitey.

The attendant threw open a door, and the little fugitive stepped inside. As the lock clicked behind him he sighed with relief. Here was one place that Gyp would not look for him. And it would take more than the bath attendant to rout him out till train time.

Ouside the station Gyp Thoms, all unconscious of playing the part of Fate, had spotted the party he was waiting for. Lifting his hat he smiled down upon a young girl.

"Thought you was never comin'," he remarked.

"Ain't it the truth, dearie," the girl replied. "But waitin' didn't hurt nobody, did it?"

An assumption which Whitey Wilkins in his private bath might have taken exception to.

II.

Big Bateese came through the smother of a December blizzard to Simpkins's Trail's End; a huge figure bulging the rough Mackinaw suit and leaving a wake of snow that rose like smoke behind him. Ahead the dogs toiled as they dragged a laden toboggan through the drifts. He guided them by voice alone, this Big Bateese, for he had a way with dogs as with men—and with women too—guided them till, abruptly, a sharp word of command brought them up, sliding on their haunches, before the door of Simpkins's big log store and hotel that was known through the north country as Trail's End.

Lem Simpkins came to the door—a small, baldheaded man, trader and incurable optimist, who was waiting to grow rich with a town that had not started and a railroad that had long ago stopped crawling in his direction. His eyes swept in surprise the big Canuck, the dogs, and the toboggan.

"Strike her rich, Bateese? Find gold or somethin'? Back soon ain't yer?" Then, noting his absence for the first time: "Where's yer partner? Where's François?"

Big Bateese silently drew back the tarpaulin that covered the toboggan. One glance and the experienced eye of Lem Simpkins had the tale as complete as if it had been told to him in every detail, for the blue powder marks, the gaping wound on the face of him who lay there dead, were signs of the manner of his taking off. A stumble over a deadfall, the quick involuntary shock of the rifle butt against the ground as François slipped and fell, the dull muffled crash as the soft nosed bullet tore its way into the face thrown against the muzzle of the rifle—and, now, the still figure on the sled.

Silently Lem Simpkins went indoors, to emerge a moment later bearing a pick and shovel. Unhitching the dogs, the two men dragged the toboggan and its burden to the side of the clearing, and there, where the tall pines threw their shadows on the snow, began to dig.

For hours the muffled thud thud of the pick and the rasp of the frozen earth on the shovel continued. For the winter comes early in that country, turning the good earth to iron. It was twilight when they finished, and as they stood there watching the driven snow blot out the raw yellow of the new made grave, Big Bateese spoke for the first time.

"By dam, he was fine partner, dat François. I don't find annudder lak heem for sure."

The dogs, with the sympathy that exists between man and beast in the lonely places, howled dismally, their frost-rimmed muzzles pointed to the dim stars.

For two weeks the big Frenchman mourned his partner. Inarticulate, melancholy, he sat around Simpkins's cabin, responding with monosyllables to his host's voluble efforts to cheer him up. He knew that his work lay elsewhere, but it seemed treason to the tradition of his kind to leave that silent one who lay at the border of the woods, his partner, comrade on a long trail that stretched back through the years, back to the dawn of his memory, almost. And though his line of traps lay set and his cabin clung dark and cold to a distant hillside a good sixty miles north, he could not yet face the old life for the new loneliness that would now be its outstanding feature.

Not even when a timber cruiser and two assistants came in for supplies did the gloom lift from him. They played euchre with a greasy deck of cards, drank the whisky *blanc* that Simpkins brought out to them, and finally, as men do in that region, settled about the great stove that was eating its way through a huge woodpile, to swap yarns and bandy about tales that their grandfathers, perhaps, had brought to the country decades ago. But Big Bateese sat aloof, indifferent, brooding.

Came a bursting open of the door, a flurry of snow, and a big man who half led, half carried, his smaller companion into the warmth and comfort.

"Where from, Leclaire?" asked Simpkins.

"De railroad, Allouette, hit's mos' too long for heem. Two, t'ree day we travel, an' mos' time I almos' carry heem." He pointed to his companion, directing the eyes of the others to him.

What they saw was food for merriment. A green overcoat of the style known to more sophisticated men as Klassy Kollege Kut, reached from neck to knee. It bulged as if, some additional warmth being desired, the owner had introduced features not counted on by the maker, as indeed was true.

Several thicknesses of newspaper lay between the lining and the fabric of the garment. Upon his head the newcomer wore a felt hat, its brim tied about his ears by a red wool comforter, which, with the moccasins on his feet, constituted the sole features of his get up that were appropriate to the place and season. As the men examined him, they became aware for the first time that he was sniveling, much as a small, scared puppy snivels when opposed to the unknown and terrible.

"I don' know, me, for why he do dat," remarked Leclaire as, having thrown off his own outer garments, he started to unwrap his strange companion. "He cry like dat for two, t'ree mile."

"W'at you got dere, a babee?" asked one of the timber cruisers. "Me, I t'ink yes."

The comforter unwound sufficiently to clear the face of the sniveler.

"Dere now, Whitey," went on Leclaire. "You say 'Bring me queek eighty, hondred mile.' I bring. Dat's right, hein?"

"Whitey?" echoed the timber cruiser. "Whitey! I t'ink perhaps he's lak de small white mouse I see wan time on Montreal. All de time he shiver an' shiver."

The object of his interest fixed him with a beady eye that shone from between pale lashes.

"What's eatin' you?" he asked, speaking from the corner of his tight lipped mouth.

The sniveling had ceased. The welcome warmth of the cabin was bringing life back to his numbed body. Behind in New York it had been necessary to eat dirt, to flee from known perils, and a certain fate, but here, what were these rudely clad men but hicks, a bit more picturesque, perhaps, than the rubes who strayed into New York, but for all that the sort one could handle easily.

"Anybody talkin' to me?" asked Whitey Wilkins.

"For sure," his tormenter, the big timber cruiser, got up and stood there towering over him. "You don' lak what I say?"

"You're clever—with your mouth." Whitey's hand slid inside his coat, ripped open the vest whose spherical buttons yielded to a touch, and grasped the hilt of an automatic. The new blueness of it flashed out. The timber cruiser found himself looking into a small circle of steel. "Back where I come from we talk with this," snarled Whitey Wilkins.

The timber cruiser backed away a pace, ostentatiously pretending fear. "You got cradle for this babee, Simpkins?" he asked. "I t'ink we tak' away hees rattle an'—"

"Up with them hands." Whitey stepped after him. "You was sayin'?"

There was dead silence. The timber cruiser measured the distance. It was too far for a kick, and to leap at the little man would invite trouble. He hated to back down, for the word would travel around the north country that a runt from the city had shut him up; but that gun wasn't trembling, to speak of, and the little man's face was still sneering at him along its blue length.

There was the soft pad pad of moccasined feet, and Big Bateese, leaping from his corner, folded a huge hand over the weapon. For the life of him, though he saw the big Canadian coming, Whitey could not fire. Perhaps he sensed a friendly purpose, perhaps he, too, welcomed a solution that called for no bloodshed, but his manner failed to convey this. A stream of curses broke from his lips to scald their astonished ears. But Big Bateese held up one capable hand—and Whitey Wilkins, would-be gunman of the East Side, was silent.

Bateese turned to the timber cruiser.

"You lak make fon wit' me, perhaps maybe?" His voice was soft, insinuating. It was the challenge direct. He had assumed the quarrel.

The timber cruiser was silent. The challenge was not accepted.

"Den," Bateese opened the door, "we don' want dis t'ing roun' here." And he threw the automatic out into the snow.

"Whatcha mean, you big stiff?" Whitey cried angrily.

Bateese drew him by the arm to the long bench backed by the log wall and gently forced him down.

"Leetle man, you lissen to Bateese. Dese gons all right for de city. Up here—no." He shook his head. "You live on Montreal?"

"N'yawk," snarled Whitey scornfully.

"Dat's big place, too. Mos' big lak Montreal."

Whitey was tempted to laugh at the hick, but something restrained him.

"You stay here maybe? We make good mans out of you."

"I ain't here 'cause I like freezin', you big stiff."

"You want job, yes?"

"Naw." Whitey turned to face Bateese. "This here's a place no white man 'd live in, see? An' them that is after me won't never come nosin' round. But say—" He eyed the big Canuck suspiciously. "What's all this to you, eh? Come clean. There ain't no telegraph line up here, is there? You don't know nothin' about Butch an' his gang?"

"Butch—dat's fonny name," Bateese grinned.

"The guy that wears it ain't funny." Whitey's suspicions died. After all, how could this big, simple hick be in league with his enemies.

"I don' know this Butch," Bateese assured him.

"Then I stay here. But a job? Not for Whitey Wilkins."

The brooding mood had dropped from Big Bateese for good now. He looked searchingly at the white face of the little man from New York's East Side and saw there something not apparent to every one, the dim spark of courage that might be nursed into flame. Suddenly he thrust out his hand.

"I t'ink you come wit' me, Whitey. Up nort' sixty mile for trap an' shoot."

Whitey brushed the hand aside.

"Think I'm crazy, you big stiff?"

"You come jus' de same, Whitey."

"It's likely," said Whitey to himself, but he had an uneasy feeling that it *was* likely.

III.

DURING the next day, following the departure of the timber cruisers, and while Bateese was gone after deer meat, Whitey Wilkins floundered around in the snow, looking for the automatic which the big Canuck had wrestled from him, but, save for chilblains and a bad cold, his efforts were without result. He tried to buy a gun from Simpkins, but that worthy, with a short "Wait till you can use one right," dismissed the subject cavalierly. So, without the little death dealing device that had meant manhood in his far-distant New York, Whitey felt helpless for the first time in his crowded young life.

He tried to suborn the guide, Leclaire, who had brought him in, but that worthy, after receiving his wages, departed, unmoved by his former employer's entreaties, and Whitey found himself a captive, though unchained save by the miles of snow and forest and solitude, but a captive nevertheless.

Big Bateese did not leave him long to mope over his fate. Simpkins kept a store of sorts, and together they fitted Whitey up with clothing more suited to the life he was to lead. As they completed his wardrobe he was surprised to find himself taking pride in the mackinaw coat, the moccasins, the heavy socks, a sneaking pride that he banished at once before his metropolitan scorn for things outside his home town.

Bateese dragged him over miles of country on snowshoes, increasing the journey each day, and each evening bringing him back to Simpkins's tired out, aching in every muscle. But Whitey noticed that while the journeys lengthened daily, the pain and fatigue which smote him at the journey's end did not increase. He doubted

at first if they could increase, but later he saw that he was hardening; that the big Canuck was training him as thoroughly as one trains a race horse, and sullenly he admitted to himself that Bateese knew his job.

He awoke one morning to hear the dogs yapping excitedly at the door. The sun was abreast the tops of the tall pines about the clearing. One glance, and Whitey snuggled back among the blankets. It was cold outside—even a novice could tell that. But he was not allowed to enjoy the warmth of his bed for long. A big hand ruthlessly stripped off the bedclothes, and the cheery voice of Bateese drew him once more from the depths of slumber.

"Hola, *mon ami!* Eet is time for depart."

He dressed protestingly, gulped a heavy breakfast, still resolved to escape the coming journey. But how? Weaponless, he was up against it. He had but his native wit to help him, and what would wit count for in a fight with Bateese on the Frenchman's own ground? Some stratagem, some sudden turn of the cards in his favor, this alone Whitey Wilkins might hope for.

In this mood he donned snowshoes and followed the dog team as they slogged over the deep snow. Bateese, ahead breaking trail, took his coming as a thing settled and understood. With never a backward glance he broke through the drifted ridges, his head up and a song on his lips, and Whitey followed, though the pace wore him down in spite of his recent practice, followed uncomplainingly, the pride that was recently born in him sealing his lips when he would have called for a rest.

The icy air stabbed his unaccustomed lungs, the muscles of his thighs glowed like red-hot iron, then became part of one dull ache that held him in its remorseless grip from head to foot. When they stopped at noon he managed to keep erect until Bateese, with a few ready blows of his hand ax, had thrown together a pile of fragrant spruce branches. Upon these Whitey subsided while the big man built the fire and boiled the can of tea around which a true northern meal is built.

Fed, they lounged, smoking, for a few moments. Then Bateese, going to the tarpaulin-covered toboggan, drew forth a rifle.

"Dis for you, Whitey, w'en we go shoot," he said, and returned it to its place.

He rummaged in the pocket of his mackinaw. "An' dis, I t'ink you lak dis now." And he proffered the astonished Whitey his own automatic.

Scarcely believing his good luck, Whitey seized it. A hasty glance and he saw that it was clean, rustless, and that the magazine clip still held its stubby cartridges. A returning wave of confidence swept over him. He rose stiffly and hobbled to the toboggan where the dogs lay close together.

"Hitch 'em up, you big stiff," he cried, and Bateese straightened at the tone.

Whitey covered him with his automatic.

"You got another guess comin' if you think I'm goin' to go with you. Hitch 'em up an' turn 'em round. We're bound back to Simpkins's this trip."

Bateese grinned, whispered a few words of rapid French, and remained motionless. But as he spoke something struck Whitey on the chest. It was the lead dog, a big husky that had been crouching there at his feet. He pressed the trigger as he went down, the snarling dog reaching for his throat as he fell.

A few feathery pine needles drifting down from above showed the course of the bullet. Then for a horrible moment he felt the hot breath of the big brute as it thrust its muzzle into the woolen muffler about his throat. The next instant he was standing on his feet, and Bateese was dusting the snow from his clothes. The dog, still growling, was crouched there ready for further action should his adored master so decide.

"I t'ink you drop somet'ing, Whitey," said Bateese.

And he handed back the automatic!

"Aw, hell, you big stiff!" said Whitey. He looked about him for a mark. A squirrel chattered angrily above his head. He raised the automatic and fired. A bloody tangle of fur dropped to the snow. "I ain't goin' with you just because I'm scared, you big boob," he said as he strapped on his snowshoes.

Bateese smiled.

The reluctant dogs settled to the trail's

work once more. To his surprise, Whitey found his muscles limbering as he followed. His lungs were coping with the cold air now, and the blood raced through his veins like wine. He began to feel the spell of the silent forest, to understand why men could live there with never a glimpse at the bright lights that had hitherto been his world. And as he conquered the fatigue of the trail there came to him grudging admiration for the big man ahead to whom such fatigue was unknown.

They stopped that night at a thick plantation of spruce in a hollow. As Bateese unharnessed the tired dogs, Whitey seized the ax and began to aim clumsy blows at the lower branches of the trees. Bateese watched him contentedly. The leaven was working. Whitey had learned the first lesson of the trail. He was helping as best he could to make camp.

They slept beneath a lean-to of boughs, the dogs nested about them in the snow, men and animals seeking mutual warmth together. On the morning came the trail once more, and the second night found them at the cabin where Bateese made his headquarters.

The weeks that followed were a revelation to Whitey Wilkins. Bateese, seeing the spell which was slowly winning him, wisely exhibited in a never ending sequence the charms and attractions of the life that was his. He confined his trapping to nearby country in order that his partner might go along, and, like a well trained showman, he ever kept some new surprise, some new activity to spur Whitey's interest should the life pall upon him. A week after their arrival Whitey shot his first moose. From then on the wilderness claimed him as its own.

He got peeps into the shy thing that was Bateese's soul. As they sat of nights in their cabin, the big man, ever cheerful, ever striving to win and hold his new partner, would tell tales, small, cameolike descriptions of things he had seen and done, and Whitey as he listened learned to respect the big Canuck as he had respected no one during his short and hectic career.

He learned, too, the reason for his presence here. "W'en you come in dat day, Whitey, I t'ink me, 'Dat's one sad t'ing. Yong man lak him not know notting, not do notting, come for live on de woods. He get in trouble for sure.' An' w'en you make for fight dat big man I say, 'He have courage, dat leetle man.' An' I feel lonely, me, so I tak you—an' I t'ink you don' min' now, Whitey?"

"You big stiff," said Whitey; but there was a new ring to the words.

And another night:

"I t'ink we go on Ste. Gregoire soon, Whitey, for see my girl."

Whitey felt a twinge of jealousy. Unknown to himself he had come to regard the big Canadian as his. And now the woman entered.

"What do you want wid the skirts, Bateese?" he grumbled.

"Marie she wan fine girl, Whitey. She been work on States for two, t'ree year, an' wait for me to mak money. Now she come home on Ste. Gregoire. I t'ink perhaps I get marry, me, w'en we get dere."

"Leave 'em alone, Bateese. The skirts never did no one no good. Take it from me, pardner, I know 'em."

He hated the thought of sharing Bateese with any one, and he had his reasons for distrusting women.

"See here, old-timer," he said, "you don't want no women. Look at me. Do you know why I come runnin' up here like a scared pup? 'Cause a woman got gay with me. Yes, a damn skirt I didn't give a hoot for."

"Dat's fonny," Bateese grinned. "You ron from girl. Mos' men ron *to* dem, for sure, but you—you ron from wan leedle girl. Dat's fonny, for sure."

"That's what you think," Whitey grumbled. "Listen to me, Bateese. You know all about animals, but when it comes to the kind of folks in my home town you're nothin' but a big baby. You don't know nothin' a-tall. This here skirt had a feller—a steady—Butch his name was, big as you, quick with his gun too, and him and his gang gets sore when she takes a shine to me and started to wipe me up. Me, I wasn't havin' any, so I come away."

"You mean dat dis beeg man he don' fight wit' his hands?"

Whitey sniffed. "Why should he, him with his gang to help him."

"But it is not correc'," Bateese explained. "W'en two men want de one gal, dey fights wit' their hands, an' after de wan man he make marriage wit' de girl, an' de odder he say, '*Mon ami*, you are de bes' man.' Den he kees de bride an'—"

"An' then he wakes up with the undertaker fittin' a new wooden suit on him. No, Bateese, you can't string me. Girls is girls everywhere, and g-i-r-l spells trouble."

"I t'ink New York she is fonny place," Bateese commented. "I don' like for live on dat town for sure. I get scare of dat Butch, me."

Whitey eyed his big comrade thoughtfully. "Mebbe," he said at last, "but come to think of it I wouldn't be surprised—" He slapped his leg. "I'd gamble on it, Bateese. If that Butch Herkimer got up against you here without his gang mebbe he'd be scared too."

He paused. And in the silence came to Whitey Wilkins a twinge of homesickness. New York. It had been his home. And Mary Carney, after all was said and done, had been a nice girl in her way. Perhaps she was worrying over what had befallen him. Butch would never tell her that he had let his man escape.

"Bateese," he said, "when does that Injun come through—the one that went in last week?"

"He come in two, t'ree day," Bateese replied.

Whitey drew a pencil from his pocket—sharpened it.

"I'm goin' to write a letter," he decided. "I'm goin' to send word to Mary Carney that I'm all right."

"I t'ink you better leave de girls alone," Bateese taunted. "De skirts, you don' give no hoots for dem, eh, Whitey?"

"You big stiff," said Whitey Wilkins as he began to write.

Two days later the Indian traveling south took his letter on to civilization.

IV.

BACK in New York things were going rather badly with Butch Herkimer. When the little rat, Whitey Wilkins, got clear, in spite of Butch's efforts to "get" him, the gang leader had lost face with his followers. From being the unquestioned chief, as he had been, Butch Herkimer had descended until he could see in the immediate future the day when some one or other of his henchmen would challenge his supremacy. Heavy drinking had not helped his nerve much, and it had got him in bad with Mary Carney.

So, on the day when he swaggered up toward her tenement home, Butch Herkimer was thinking rather seriously concerning the state of affairs. He must take a strong line of action, must at once recover his hold on his gang and his girl.

At the door of the tenement he met the postman.

"Goin' in?" that worthy asked. "Well, it' ll save me a climb, Butch. Hand this over to your girl."

He passed over a letter. The envelope was dirty. It bore a scrawled address in pencil and a Canadian stamp. It exuded a strange, somewhat unpleasant scent. A home-staying New Yorker like Butch Herkimer could not know that this came from close contact with an Indian, that it was the mixed odor of sweat, smoke, and fur.

He walked toward the stairs. On the landing, beneath a bracket light he paused and turned the letter over.

"No use takin' chances," said Butch Herkimer, and ripped the envelope open. He read:

UP NORTH.

DEAR MARY CARNEY:

Hope this finds you as well as I am when I write. I take my pencil in hand to let you know I got clean away from Butch and his bunch. I was scared you might be worrying.

A big Frenchy called Bateese brought me in here and is making a man of me. . . .

Butch Herkimer crumpled the letter into a ball and thrust it in his pocket. He straightened out the envelope and looked for the postmarks on its soiled surface.

"Allouette," he read. "God knows where that is, but if a runt like Whitey Wilkins made it—" He paused, for already a project was forming in his mind.

Whitey was writing to Mary Carney!

Did that mean, could it mean, that *she* was writing to him, that there was something between them? And Whitey was the miserable little rat he had promised to "get."

He climbed slowly up from the landing to the first floor. Yes, here was the chance he had been looking for. Up in the North Country beyond the police zone, a man could clean up old scores. And it would be spectacular, this foray into foreign territory. It would be something to boost his stock with his sullen, grumbling henchmen, already wavering in their allegiance. It would make him again what he had been —a personality, a man who had done something, Butch Herkimer who never failed.

It was in this mood that he rapped on Mary Carney's door.

"Who's there?" Mary's voice came, muffled, through the heavy panel.

"Me." Butch grasped the handle, sought to open the door. It was locked. He shook it savagely. "Me, Butch. I come up to talk turkey."

"I'm through with you." Mary Carney, too, had been doing a bit of thinking. A leader of gunmen was one thing, a dead gunman was another. And from whispered rumors she feared that Butch Herkimer would soon qualify for the latter class. A steady head had Mary Carney, and she lived in circles where a girl must look out for herself.

"I'm through with you," she repeated. "And don't break that door down, or I'll call a cop."

Butch dropped the handle.

"Is that so?" he snarled, his face working. His hand strayed to the butt of his gun, then came away.

After all, this was no time for that stuff. He had a better come-back.

"Stuck on that white-faced rat I chased out of town, hey?" he sneered. "Well, here's somethin' to think over." He slid the letter under the door.

He could hear Mary Carney's footsteps as she crossed the room, and the rustle of paper as she picked the letter up, opened it out.

He gave her time to read it.

"You'll hear from me again, you ——." said Butch as he turned away from the locked door. "*When I come back from Allouette!*"

V.

EARLY in March, Whitey Wilkins coming in from the trap line in mid afternoon paused at the crest of the hill above the cabin, and, shading his eyes, peered down river where the trail from Simpkins's twisted clear of the forest. A big dot showed black, ahead of it other smaller dots. Behind it a tiny figure moved.

"Dogs," decided Whitey. "Hi, there, Bateese, folks comin'."

Bateese came out of the cabin below.

Whitey tramped down hill and joined him.

"Wonder who's comin'. And why?" Whitey asked.

"Fonny time for come on woods." Bateese took another look at the distant group. "I t'ink dat is Simpkins."

"You can't see him well enough to know who it is," Whitey objected.

"I can see how he drive dogs," Bateese explained. And five minutes later Lem Simpkins himself arrived, breathless, to prove him right.

"What for you come?" Bateese asked.

"Pleasure!" snorted Lem. "Bein' young and foolish, I got tired o' settin' at home. What 'd you think? S'pose a man mushes right through from Trail's End for amusement? No, I got news for ye." He eyed Whitey Wilkins curiously. "Got to hand it to ye, Bateese, you sure made a man out o' this bird. Pity it won't last."

"And for why?" Bateese asked.

"'Cause there's a he-desperado sittin' at my place waitin' for a chance to croak him, a big brute by the name o' Butch Herkimer. Home folks he is, Whitey, and he loves ye like a brother, he does."

"Butch." Whitey paled under his winter's bronzing. "Butch up here—"

Bateese watched him, silently, curiously. Bateese had nursed the spark of courage in Whitey Wilkins. Now had come the crucial test.

"We—we got dogs," Whitey stammered. "An' if I mooch up north for a bit—"

"He ain't pleasant company, for a fact."

Lem Simpkins went on: "He come to Allouette an' asked questions, an' finally a half-breed brought him in. He confided to me, he did, this Butch Herkimer, that he was some bad. I had to waste a quart o' my best licker on him to oil his tongue, but he sure spouted when oiled. He figgers there ain't no law in these parts, and that when he meets up with ye, Whitey, he'll shoot ye full o' holes."

"For why he not come here?" Bateese asked.

"Well, that's a question. Man needs dogs to travel in this country, an', strange to say, my beasts was busy, an' what's more, havin' mislaid his gun, he figgered to look about an' find it, or else borrow one." Lem grinned and slapped his belt. "Which is sure comic, me havin' removed said gun, thoughtless, an' hung her right here."

"He could fix me with his hands," Whitey broke in, nervously. "You don't know Butch an' his likes, Bateese. They ain't white like you. They're filled with dope and booze and when they start after a man they don't care what happens to themselves so long as they get him. He could take me apart, I tell you—"

"Hell!" Simpkins spat disgustedly. "Me, I thought Bateese had made a man of ye, Whitey. That's why I come in to warn ye, give ye a fightin' chance. That's why I pinched this here Butch's gun."

"You don't know him. Get out the dogs, Bateese. I'm goin' north till he's gone." Whitey edged toward the cabin.

Big Bateese grasped him by the shoulder, swung him round.

"Whitey, Whitey—" He shook him gently. "Why for you scare'? In New York this Butch is bad man for sure, wit' hees gang and all dose guns. But here, Whitey. Dat's different for sure. What you tole me, one night in the cabin: 'Bateese, if that Butch Herkimer got up against you here, without his gang—he'd be scared, too.' Well, *mon ami,* M. Herkimer, he is here—an' de gang, she stay on New York, an' you want for ron away like leetle boy. Dat's not good, for sure."

"I ain't got no gang, neither, and he's bigger than me." Whitey objected.

Bateese waved a hand around him, a comprehensive gesture that took in the forest, the frozen river, the leagues of wild country.

"I t'ink you have a gang, my frien'," he said simply. "I t'ink you belong in dis country, for sure. I t'ink all dese t'ings are your gang."

"You mean—" Whitey asked uncertainly.

"If M. Butch come in here, alone—I t'ink he get more scare dan Whitey Wilkins was," Bateese explained. "Me, I don' t'ink a bad man has de strong heart. But you, Whitey—"

Whitey Wilkins twisted free. "I'm stickin'," he said. "Now what 'll I do?"

Bateese thought for a moment. "If this Butch—start in alone—wit' the dogs—he'll—"

Simpkins saw what he was driving at. "You've got a head on you, Bateese. I'll start him with just enough grub to keep these here wild huskies from dinin' on him the first day. It 'll take a greenhorn three days to come through if he drives 'em at all. Guess at that I'd better send my Injun along to start him. Then when he gets messed up on the trail or off it Whitey can happen along and get the drop on him. An' after that—well, it won't be my business, nor yet yours."

"I t'ink dat's right, for sure." Bateese smiled. "You tell M. Butch dat Whitey is alone."

Whitey Wilkins grinned. "Now you put it plain like I guess I ain't scared of him. I mind what this damn country did to me when I first come in."

"Oh-o, *mon ami!*" Bateese grew serious. "Dis damn country, she scare you firs', but now, I t'ink she make a man of you."

"I got to feed them brutes." Simpkins turned away.

The dogs, yelping, gathered around him as he threw them frozen fish.

"Eat hearty, you brutes," he admonished them. "You're due to travel in the next few days."

VI.

SITTING on the toboggan, Butch rubbed his smarting eyes, and cursed.

"Damn this country—damn me for a fool to come into it—" His memory pictured the events of the preceding days. The return of Simpkins to Trail's End, ostensibly from some business expedition; the offer of the dogs and a driver, and the word that Whitey Wilkins was holed up in a lonely cabin two days' mushing away. The start, on snowshoes, with frequent rests on the toboggan as the dogs dragged it along the firm trail. Then the mysterious disappearance of his Indian guide, and his clumsy efforts to go on alone.

He remembered how the dogs had grown savage, how, searching through the meager supplies he had found but little food for them. He had thrown what frozen fish there was into the growling, snapping mass of huskies—then grabbing a broken tree limb, he had spent an hour beating them, striving to drive them from each other's throats. Finally, exhausted, he had got them harnessed, after a fashion. Even then his courage had been unbroken. He had resolved to press on. Surely the worst was over.

Then came the snow, blotting out the trail. A bend in the river to which the trail clung, a seeming short-cut, and Butch Herkimer, stumbling painfully behind the sulky dog team had forsaken the bottoms, and taken to the uplands.

After that came the nightmare. He was lost. Dimly he had remembered that moss always grew on one particular side of a tree; but which side? Ah, that he forgot. He made a blind guess and with the remains of his courage urged the tired dogs on through deep snow.

He had come at last to this high, bare place. The sun had come out soon after he had lost the trail. It glared on the new fallen snow, as March suns do. Its rays tortured his eyes used to the somber city streets. They were red, running. He must close them from time to time, as he rested here, for otherwise the pain of them proved too severe. Though he did not know it, he was going snowblind.

The dogs, squatting in the snow, rested, too. Hunger gnawed them. The leader edged nearer, the hair on his neck ruffling as he eyed this man, this stranger who knew not how to feed and drive a dog team. Some telepathic influence seemed to emanate from the husky leader to the other dogs. They, too, crept closer, the harness alone restraining them. The man noticed this, and shuddered.

The husky leader thrust his nose around. Fascinated, the man watched him though it tortured his eyes to do so. The dog was gnawing at the harness. In a moment he would be free, and then—

Butch Herkimer staggered to his feet. Nothing at hand could he find to serve as a weapon. The nearest bush was a hundred yards off.

He started trudging across the snow, his hands stretched out ahead of him as he groped his way, half blinded, stumbling through the deep drifts.

Behind him he heard a hoarse growl. The husky was loose!

He tried to run, but his feet were numb. His sense of balance was going with his sight. He fell, and, falling, heard the sharp crack of a rifle.

The dog, pausing in his leaping advance, twisted sidewise, fell on the snow, yelped once and then lay still. From the bush came Whitey Wilkins, a smoking rifle in his hands.

"Hell!" said Whitey Wilkins as he looked down on the sniveling, tormented, blinded creature wallowing in the snow. "That's what I was scared of! Guess Bateese was right—guess my gang got him."

He slid Butch Herkimer along the snow to the toboggan. The remaining dogs were quiet now. When he had lashed Butch firmly, and covered him with the tarpaulin, he paused a moment to get his bearings.

"Damn fool!" said Whitey Wilkins as he found a landmark near by. "Half a mile from the trail and he gave up. 'Course, judgin' from his tracks, he drove stupid all the way. Fools mostly does in this country."

Then the dogs leaped forward at his command. He steadied the toboggan as they tore down hill toward the river and the trail.

"Ain't he goin' to have a surprise?" thought Whitey Wilkins as he swung along

"Ain't Butch Herkimer goin' to be worth lookin' at when he finds out who saved him."

VII.

For three days Butch Herkimer lay in a bunk at Bateese's cabin, his eyes bandaged, suffering the tortures of the damned. During that time Whitey Wilkins spoke no word to him or to his partner, Bateese. He had other plans that could only be served if he kept his identity a secret. So he let Bateese receive the grudging thanks which Butch thought proper, let his enemy assume that the big French-Canadian had saved him from the dogs, had him brought him in.

On the fourth day Butch took off the bandage at dawn. His eyes still smarted, but he could see.

He glanced about the cabin as the early light brought out each detail. A man threw back his blankets and stepped out of the bunk opposite, a big man, a stranger to him.

"*M'sieu'* has talk wit' me before." Bateese it was, big Bateese, who came across the cabin and squatted on the side of his bunk.

"You brought me here?" Butch Herkimer asked. "All right, all right, I'll make it right with you. And, say, want to make a bit of change?"

"I t'ink so, maybe," Bateese temporized.

"Then listen to me." Butch raised up on one elbow. "I come in here lookin' for a guy—a dirty little runt I got a lot against. Back in that beastly one-horse hole I stayed at some hick stole my gat. You lend me one and show me where this Whitey Wilkins holes up and I'll give you fifty bucks."

"But, *m'sieu'* "—Bateese seemed puzzled —" dat is not right. Jus' t'ink—three, four days ago—you was mos' dead, and somebody keel the dog what made for eat you—somebody drive dose odder dogs here—an' save your life. And now you say: 'Give me gon, an' I keel a man.'"

"Show me where he is, this Whitey I'm lookin' for, and I'll kill him with my hands." Butch raised up on one elbow.

Bateese stepped across the cabin and lifted the blankets clean off his own bunk. Lying along the wall was Whitey Wilkins himself.

"*M'sieu'*, behhol'! De man dat brought you in. De man dat save your life. An' w'en he come to you he have hees rifle, and you, you have noddings."

Butch Herkimer slumped back. Whitey Wilkins sprang out, came across and stood over him.

"Lookin' for me, eh?" he said, his voice low, yet steady, the voice of a man unafraid. "You're the thing that drove me out of my home town, you're the gunman I was scared of. I ran from you like a rabbit, didn't I, Butch Herkimer? Well, you come after me. You've found me. *What — are — you — going — to — do — about—it?*"

Butch Herkimer stared at him, made no move.

Whitey Wilkins grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Get up, get up!" he cried. "Get up, you swine! I'm going to knock hell out of you!"

Butch Herkimer twisted free, rolled over and faced the wall. For a moment there was silence. Then the sound of his sobbing broke the stillness.

"I t'ink—" Bateese grinned. "I t'ink dis country—how you say, Whitey—dis country got him?"

"Guess you're right, partner." Whitey turned away in disgust.

"How the hell can I get a fight out of him?"

"Nevaire mind." Bateese came across the room and threw a big arm around his shoulder. "Soon the snow she goes, and the water rons, and the rivers are good for the leetle canoe. I t'ink Bateese an' his partner go nort', Whitey. Maybe dis time we mak' Hudson Bay."

"And what 'll we do with this bit of cheese?" Whitey gestured toward Butch Herkimer.

"I don' know, for sure," Bateese replied. "But I t'ink maybe we fin' squaw for nurse heem till his modder come put her babee bye-bye."

THE END

Old Crow

By KARL W. DETZER

CAPTAIN NATHAN CROW, Engine 27, had just "blowed the company out of the window," and the fire department buzzed with the news. He had been warned about his temper; Sparks McCullough, the fire marshal himself, had hinted at retirement, had even cited cases of discharge without pay. For six months after that warning Captain Crow scowled, grumbled, and held on to his tongue.

Then came the 4-11 alarm to the Rasmus rag warehouse, with Engine Company 27 eating smoke as thick as cream in the basement. Somewhere a floor beam fell. And Pipeman Joe Barney dropped the hose nozzle to flee, without orders, for safety. The story they told up and down the department that night was that Captain Crow not only called Barney a yellow dog, but drove his whole company out of the cellar with an ax, and returned alone to handle the pipe.

As to blowing them out of the window, that was merely a sooty figure of speech, accepted in the department because of long usage. Once back at the engine house Captain Crow lined up his six men and with stark, unembroidered words, consigned them to fires against which pumping engines are of no avail. They would desert the lines only when he told them to hereafter. Then he banged his rubber boots up the brass-bound treads to his quarters and left the crew eying each other sullenly.

It was not the fire marshal who arrived an hour later to hold a private interview with the captain, but young Red Ranger, the new battalion chief. Old Crow would have preferred the marshal, so far as that went. He belonged to the same generation as the marshal. And Red Ranger was young. He was a bustling, efficient, energetic, young "get-there" fellow, a favorite with the men, a soft-toned fireman of the new school. He wrote a legible hand, spoke

with a decent tongue, was dignified, and kept his boots shining; decidedly of the new school.

"Captain Crow?" he asked down at the alarm desk. "Upstairs?" Never mind, men, sit down. I'll get him."

Above, on the second floor, he heard the swish of water in the shower baths, where the last of the company was swabbing off sweated smoke. A warm, steaming, soapy smell spread through the bunk room. At the front desk Captain Crow was signing his report, squatting in his chair, short legged, thick waisted, bulldog jawed, belligerent.

His head was rather large for his body; his eyes were small for his head. Brindled hair stood up uncompromisingly, large veins ridged his temples, small veins crimsoned his button nose; his face was scarred, battered, dented. A thousand fires had branded it, seared it deep, twisted it into unforgetable grotesqueries. The mark of flame was indelible upon him. He was sixty-one years old.

"Evening, captain."

"Evenin', sir."

The young chief paused, looked for a chair, and finding none, sat down on the foot of a cot. It was awkward, this job of his. Not that he feared Captain Crow, not that he felt too small to handle a situation. But Red Ranger had been a pipeman under the old captain; had gone through the ranks, third class to first, with Crow's voice blaspheming in his ear. As a lieutenant he was sent to the North Side, as a captain down town, and now, promoted to battalion chief, he found his old commander serving under him. Very thoughtless of the board at the city hall, assigning him back to his own old battalion!

Those first five years in the department stuck out sharp as nails in Red Ranger's memory. Captain Crow never had liked him, had filed charges against him when he was a third class pipeman for some trifling slip in dress regulations. They had quarreled over tactics once, face to face in a smoky attic with all the world ablaze around them, and each promised the other dire things, should they get out alive. Finally, when Red Ranger grew to be a captain, he had fought the pension clause Crow sponsored in the new regulations of the mutual aid. Crow won that tilt; Ranger still resented it.

Old Crow threw down his pen and asked him what he wanted.

"Came to check up a story, captain. Heard it this afternoon, just after I got back from the rag warehouse. I'll ask you plainly, and I expect you to answer just as clear. Did you drive one of your men out of the basement with an ax?"

"I run 'em all out!"

Captain Crow crumpled his fresh report and flung it toward a basket. Red Ranger flushed.

"I suppose you know what that offense means, sir. I wanted to know the truth about it before the marshal called me up. Oh, no—I won't tell him. You know right well I won't. I won't have to. There's other tongues than mine in the business."

"And I'll tell him a bit or two m'sel'! Joe Barney dropped the pipe—and run! Run like a ree-croot. Scared 'cause he heard a floor fallin' upstairs. And the rest run with him. Then they was for wantin' to come back!"

His little eyes screwed up balefully.

"So I give 'em something to run fur!"

"Chased them out with an ax. I guess this spells quits, captain. Chief McCullough will stand a lot. But he's warned us, battalion and company commander alike, fifty times if he's done it once, never even threaten the men with physical violence. When this story of the ax gets on to him, well, you know what's going to happen."

December evening was snuffing down early on the West Side street. Motor cars slid past cautiously on flapping chains. A child, racing through the snow, slipped on ice by the street car track. Captain Crow grunted, got up out of his chair, and watched the boy pick himself up. He turned back, still grunting, to Red Ranger.

"Listen, chief," he growled. "When I want you or any other mushroom white hat telling me how to run men, or run m'sel', I'll come askin' for help. And as to the old man, I know Sparks McCullough. Maybe they's a thing or two *I* can tell him. Sure, you're chief of battalion. I can't

help that. I didn't put you there. I got to go where you put me. But listen—I ain't got no more use for you than a dead cat! Now try to drown that out!"

Red Ranger lost his dignity and flared.

"None of your noisy talk with me, Crow! You're an old man, and I'm sorry for you, or I'd bust you out of the fire department just for saying that much. You've always been a trial, no matter who had this battalion. But you'll not be with me! No, I'll not suspend you. But by the mighty I'll make you toe the mark! We've been at cross cuts for a long time, you and I. Now I'm going to break you! You can bulldoze and roar and throw axes all you want on your days off duty, but from now on, from this minute, Cap Crow, you toe the line with me! I'll teach you some manners, and I'll teach you some discipline!"

"Dee-cipline! What does the johnny-jump-up likes of ye know of dee-cipline? Pettin' and purrin' at a lot of lazy firemen, eatin' soft soup for 'em!"

He stopped. Down in the apparatus room where the long crimson motor pumper stood ready for new work, scoured and polished and dusted after its roaring job that afternoon, the alarm instrument began to stammer with small talk of great affairs. In departmental code it pittered off a short string of dots.

Eight taps, then six, then three.

"Eight — six — three! Harmar and Kedzie!" Captain Crow knocked against Chief Ranger getting out of his chair and thought no more of him. "It's a go, men! Go! Bunk out, you whimperin' home-guards, out!"

He slid the brass pole, one gnarled arm wrapped tight around it, the other waving for speed. Before he touched the floor Hargiss, the driver, had turned over the motor, jumped into his seat, the bell spoke, and Engine 27 slid out of the doors on its way to duty. Battalion Chief Ranger followed in his own red car, keeping his chin deep in his collar, silent, frowning, thinking.

There was little to do at Harmar and Kedzie Streets. A quick confusion, four lengths of fabric hose unrolled quickly, fattened quickly with churning water, a quick smoke, and the engine companies rolled up their lines—another job done. But even in the short moment after the fire was out, while their company commanders awaited the order to return to quarters, the men of the sixth battalion had time for words.

They glanced at the rubber cased back of Captain Crow, nodded their heads wisely, and watched Chief Red Ranger issue crisp, metallic, even-voiced commands.

"Old Crow's got a hot smoke to beat this time," Joe Barney remarked sullenly.

He was a wizened, powdery little man, his face reddened by the life he lived, his hair grayed by the length of it. His mouth was pinched up as if he were eternally tasting vinegar. An upleasant fireman; twelve years in the business and he still rated second class.

Luke Hargiss leaned down from his seat on the red pumper. He was bendable for a fat man, loose hung, with slipshod posture and lazy motions.

"He'll be hearing the minutes of the last meetin' of the board of inquiry, my way of thinkin'," he remarked. "Can't bully men these days. Not with the mutual aid and the benevolent association and the unions—"

"Home!" howled Captain Crow, running back to the machine. "Quarters!"

The crew of five rode back silently, watching their commander on his seat by the driver. There being no men to bully, they perceived, he worked off spleen on the bell rope. Once he bellowed wrathfully at the driver of a skidding taxicab. A traffic policeman held up a white glove in a short, fraternal hail. Old Crow ducked his head uncivilly and grumbled.

Silence settled gloomily over the table during the belated supper. Each man paid attention to his own three pork chops, his own half dozen small boiled potatoes, his own three cups of coffee. Come strife and upheaval, mutiny, dynamite or sudden death, a fireman must have his food.

Captain Crow sat before the alarm stand, as regulations required, till the stroke of nine. Then he went vigorously about the business of going to bed, while his crew sat below in the apparatus room, listening. At

last when his light flashed out, when his boots thumped into ready position by the bed, Luke Hargiss voiced rather profane sentiments in a cautious, subdued tone.

"Old Crow's started something that it's up to us to finish!" he declared.

"What you mean, report 'im?" inquired Jess Hume. He was Engine 27's recruit, an eager, self-conscious youth. "Tell the marshal?"

Joe Barney objected roundly.

"Tell?" He spit at the trash basket. "Where you get them schoolday notions, young 'un? In the fire business you don't tell nothin'. You do!"

"That's it!" Hargiss chimed in. "Make him wish he was dead. It's easy. No out and out stuff, just lay down on the job. Go so fur for him, and no further, and pretty soon the big bosses will begin to do the tellin'."

Luke Hargiss and Joe Barney had been long in what they dignifiedly called the "fire business." Under their eyes weak officers had wilted and cowardly officers had resigned hurriedly. They knew the tricks of helmet and hose, and had worked them before effectively.

In the next ten days Engine 27 answered alarms promptly, laid its hose with alacrity, faced smoke, ate it, fought fire, did its duty with precise method and proper manner. Battalion Chief Red Ranger, watching for breaches of discipline, found nothing tangible about which to complain. Fire Marshal McCullough, squinting through smoky twilight, saw Captain Crow and his pipemen standing against heat, unflinching.

Yet the old spirit was lacking. Marshal McCullough could see it. When firemen fight fire silently something is wrong. The department is a breath-taking business, discipline and spirit labor hand in hand in its panting ranks. And when firemen go at their job as a cobbler goes at shoes, the spirit is dead. Such a company cannot be expected to leap down the throat of flame, to risk life and skin for the sake of three inches gained in a blazing areaway. Of that Marshal McCullough, who had fought fire for thirty-five years, was very certain.

Joe Barney and Luke Hargiss, young Jess Hume, and Kelly and Burke, the once buoyant, blustery crew of Engine 27, held their lips tightly shut and went where they were bid. But not a step farther. Not once did they run, howling, into the heart of a blistering fire. Not once did they swear, all together, and press forward in a tight little group about their brass pipe, where sane men might have held back.

"What's wrong in Twenty-seven?" McCullough asked Red Ranger one night after a smoky 4-11 alarm. "Where's the old pep?"

"Don't know, boss. I've noticed it's missing. Nothing I can complain about, though."

"Hum!" The marshal bit off a chunk of tobacco. "I guess old Crow's slipping. Needs a bit of physical check-up, maybe."

"They always get their engine there on time," Ranger added.

"Yes, and lay their line and take their place. But that ain't what a fireman's for. Why, they don't even cuss any more!"

Back in the quarters of Engine 27 the men shaved with astounding regularity, made their beds before breakfast each morning, stood their watches to the minute, kept the report book record clear. Captain Crow inspected them minutely, but found no reason to bellow. He felt the repression, the hostility. Yet his men uttered their "Here, sir's" briskly and efficiently. He glowered and read the final sporting edition, went to bed promptly at nine, and arose as promptly at four.

Bulletins from the office of the fire marshal, issued on February first, contained a special order that was greeted by the crew of Engine 27 with both understanding and appreciation. It enraged Captain Crow.

> Captain Nathan Crow, Eng. 27, will report to the examining board in the office of the fire marshal and chief of brigade at one o'clock on the afternoon of February fifteenth, for physical examination to determine his eligibility for pension.

A special copy of the bulletin, marked with blue pencil, arrived through the mail for Captain Crow. He read it, first through his steel spectacles, and a second time without them. He glanced up savagely at Joe Barney, who was watching him.

"Barney!"

"Yes, sir."

"Your jacket's got grease on it! Get it cleaned. When was you shaved last?"

"This morning, sir."

"Look at your chin! That ain't shavin'! Do it over!"

Pipeman Barney started toward the stair. Captain Crow glowered after him, looked at the engine, and back again at the cheerfully retreating Barney. There was mud on the right hind wheel of the pumper. And each member of the company has a specific portion of apparatus over which he stands as guardian against dust, protector from mud, warden against rust or decay. Joe Barney was superintendent of the right rear wheel.

"Barney!" Captain Crow bellowed. "Look at that right hind wheel! That's your wheel! Dirty as an ice wagon!"

Joe Barney took a rag from the locker, but did not object. He knew that there was mud on the wheel, that he had missed the hairs on his chin. What of it? Old Crow had his walking papers! There wasn't a recruit in the whole department but knew that the captain of Engine 27 couldn't stand a real physical examination. It meant one thing, and one only. About the first of May a new company commander would be moving in and cleaning out a locker.

The other men read the bulletin, chuckled, poked one another surreptitiously in the ribs, winked, waited. Old Crow grew louder, more blasphemous, more irritating than ever in the next ten days, as if he were sternly intent on making his going out a fitting and spectacular climax to a blustery career.

He did his work fiercely. Engine 27 answered five alarms a day during that first week of February. Winter strayed from the city, and spring tested the pavements, gingerly, with a mild thaw. Shirt sleeves and house-dress salesmen made their appearance. Stokers of family furnaces grew careless. Windows opened on surprised sitting rooms, and the sun shone.

All this on the tenth day of February. And on the night of the eleventh winter scurried back, dispossessing the premature tenant. Wind and snow and a crackling cold jostled at her elbow. Hurriedly relighted furnaces, carelessly kindled stoves, heedless householders—the fire bells rang.

The chill began at six o'clock. By seven the pavements were icy, and taxicab drivers climbed down from their low seats to adjust tire chains. At eight snow whooped over the roofs. At nine the fire department joker, as the instrument for recording first alarms is called, was panting through a grievous recitation of stuttering dots.

Engine 27 rushed out to a roof fire, its clanging bell biting off sharp, cold notes. A truck company arrived ahead, and put out the incipient blaze with hand pumps. At nine thirty the warehouse neighborhood echoed once more to the querulous gong. This time a tired old chimney had given up its fight against sparks, and there was plaster to be torn off, lath to be uprooted, water to be thrown. At three minutes after ten an electric wire short-circuited in a glove factory, where business always slumped in the spring. At ten thirty the boards were overladen with a contagion of alarms. At eleven o'clock, while Kelly sat on watch, listening wearily to the unending chatter of the joker, Truck Seven was sent to the corner of Spring and Hazen Streets.

Kelly frowned. A bad corner, that. Makers of barber supplies, venders of perfumes, eccentric purveyors of patent nostrums perched four deep in old, wooden-joisted buildings all about the neighborhood. Engine Thirty-nine was due to follow the truck on that still alarm. A box, pulled by the commander of the first arriving company in case the fire was too large for a small force, would hustle three more engines to the scene. A 2-11, or second alarm, would stir out four more engines and another truck. And on the 3-11, or third alarm, Engine 27 would be among those called to duty.

The brass instrument began talking again. Eight dots, four dots, one dot—the call four times repeated. Kelly ducked his lean, black head forward and fingered the cards in the "running file." Hazen and Spring Streets!

He tightened his belt, took his tongue in his teeth, and made the entry carefully on the blackboard. He stepped back to look at the clock. Five after eleven. Late! Truck Seven must have had a hard time locating that fire; must have found a good one.

The clock ticked with painstaking and annoying regularity, around one, two, three minutes—six minutes—nine minutes. Kelly sat down. Truck Seven must be drowning it out all right. They would pull a 2-11 before this. Thirteen minutes, seventeen minutes passed. Engine 42, on the South Side, had time to go out on a small alarm, do its duty, and report back to quarters, so the ticking joker informed sleepy-eyed men sitting before alarm stands all over the city.

Eight dots, four, one—two dots, eleven!

"Lord! She's got away from 'em!" Kelly sprang up and looked at the clock. "Nineteen minutes! Chemicals, I guess."

"Kelly!"

Captain Nathan Crow, sleepless, had heard the alarm.

"Aye, sir!"

"What was that 2-11?" The voice dropped weightily through the hole in the ceiling, where the brass sliding pole poked up conveniently to sleeping quarters.

"Eight forty-one; Spring and Hazen; nineteen minutes after they pulled the box."

"And ain't that a sweet locay-lity!"

"Yes, sir."

"It ain't!" Captain Crow thumped his boots on the floor at his cot. "Hey, men! Better bunk out! We're next up on a 2-11."

Snores ended abruptly. One man called out "It's a go!" in his sleep, and rolled hurriedly to the floor. Lights popped on. Fifteen seconds and Engine Twenty-seven stood for duty, rubber booted, blue shirted, hard awake. Joe Barney, wrinkling his nose as if his very dreams had been sour, slid the pole to the apparatus room. Burke, with exasperating calm, drew a comb from under his pillow and parted his thin hair. Young Jess Hume, eager-eyed, wallowed into his boots, pawed through a sweater, and asked questions of his fellows, which no one answered.

On the apparatus room floor they waited, Hargiss hovering close to the engine, Kelly stiff as a dragon on duty before the alarm stand, Burke and Barney chewing tobacco lustily, and spelling out the abbreviated code reports on the blackboard, Hume running catlike from one to the other.

"Hume! For the love of smoke stand still!" Captain Crow broke out suddenly in a rash of ill-temper and impatience. "You'd drive a fireman crazy with your snaggin' around!"

The joker answered him in a voice as cranky as his own.

"Eight; four; one!" it shouted. "Three; eleven! Eight; four; one!"

Boots scuffed the floor in the ordered confusion of a get-away. Hargiss choked the motor, opened it up, released the brake. Burke and Kelly set battered helmets solidly upon their heads and began to pull on gloves, their elbows hooked about the brass rail above the rear step. Hume clung with desperate and unaccustomed fingers to the side of the roaring car. Joe Barney clawed up to the hose box, crossed his legs around the ladders on top, and sat back impassive as an underfed Bhudda. Captain Crow, whose mind had not kept up with the transition from hoofs to gasoline, roared horsey oaths in the seat by the driver, jerked the bell rope, spread his knees and leaned forward.

Snow was deepening, wet, heavy. Engine 27 spun her nine-inch tires, waddled into a snowdrift and out again, thundered and broke into a three-mile straightaway to Spring and Hazen Streets. One mile farther it plunged around an overloaded police patrol, carrying reserves to the fire zone.

At a dark cross street it surprised a white ambulance, threatened it with bell and siren, kicked a snow bank on top of it, and grumbled on. Two miles from home it dodged under an elevated railway trestle and leaped out beyond it, into a faint, thin light that wavered over roof tops, pinkening the falling snow.

"She's busted out all right!" Kelly shouted. "See her go!"

Fire etched the skyline straight ahead.

Old Crow muttered, whipping the bell rope. Jess Hume squealed excitedly, so that Joe Barney reached out one foot and kicked contemptuously at his head.

Battalion Chief Red Ranger, who already had been half an hour on duty, and whose white helmet wore an extra peak of snow, ran out to meet the oncoming engine. He cried a short order to Captain Crow. The machine stopped. In thirty seconds Kelly and Burke were kicking away snow from a drifted water plug. Hargiss and Barney lifted the heavy suction pipe from its brackets beside the box, suspended it deftly between hydrant and apparatus, twisted it into position, and then stepped back.

"Lead off there, Burke, ye bald-headed ape!" Captain Crow shouted in his best duty manners. "Seven length — Barney, are ye a corpse? Saints spare an old man! Hume, if you got to fall over somebody, make it yourself! That's only six length—one more, one more! Now break! Break it, Barney! Couple up!"

Burke and Hume tramped a path leisurely through knee-deep snow, lugging the brass nozzle. Fifty feet back, at the end of the first length, Kelly heaved against drifts. Barney lagged behind him, the hose across his shoulder. Old Crow charged nimbly past them, cursing their lazy feet, and dodged to the left between a pair of lean old buildings.

Brushes of flame painted an impressionistic snow picture across the night. Stunted men plowed about the drifts, aped by stretching shadows. Fire popped through broken windows in a warped, four story brick building, sprayed the stolid, sooty front with tints of pink and delicate blues and apple green.

"I know what it is," Old Crow muttered. "It's one of them blasted shampoo works! They ought to be a law ag'in' 'em!"

He jammed down his helmet. The battalion chief was shouting his name.

"Right in here, captain!" Sweat showed on Red Ranger's face under the ice on his helmet. "This passage leads in to the back door. Fire's sneaking up the walls here, some way. Thought we had it twice, 'fore it got away."

"Gets away easy from some folks!" the captain remarked.

"Drove a lot of good firemen out when they were doing their best," Red Ranger answered.

Crow turned his back.

"Right here, Burke, drag in here!" he shouted. "Don't lay down—you ain't to bed! This ain't a bood-war! Here with that pipe!"

The hose jerked forward balkily, while Burke and Hume strove half-heartedly against snow. Old Crow saw Barney come into sight unhurriedly around a corner. Kelly, with more animation, kicked out a kink against a telephone pole.

"Ready!" Crow squatted behind the pipe, aimed at a door, and charged. The panel split. Dim lights that strayed from the fiercer glare above seeped into the cramped passage. They colored an oily, heavy smoke that slid in zigzags from the broken door, and across the snow. Inside, as if from a mountainous height, other cloudy lights wavered, flickered off and on, retreated, bulked nearer.

"Charge! Charge the line—Kelly, have ye a tongue in the skull of ye? Tell Hargiss! Charge!"

Kelly took up the cry, and Jess Hume passed it on.

"Engine 27—water! Charge the line, Engine 27!"

Air panted out of the pipe tip. Water drove it ahead and scurried after. The smoke backed away, ducked low, and escaped along the floor. Old Crow clenched the tip of the nozzle in his right hand and waded into the doorway. Joe Barney followed in second place, his left arm wrapped about the heavy brass butt. Behind them, guiding the line, Burke and Kelly eased down toward the ground in search of better air, and finding no relief from the suffocating smoke, both stood up suddenly. Hume, on the tail of the line, was coughing.

"In with ye!" Crow ordered. "Don't be bashful. This ain't a party! In here! It don't cost nothing. Barney, quit your pullin' or as sure as the Lord made politicians—"

The words were jammed back down into

his throat by a short jab of wind from inside the building, and a great thunder of falling plaster.

"Explosion!" Barney ejaculated.

"Shampoo blowin' up—will ye come along or not?"

Glass ripped out of a dozen more windows, pausing to chime like a thousand sheep bells on each stone sill. Heat billowed after it, feverish gusts, slanting down at the faces of the five men in the entry. They spilled water, left, right, above. It dripped back upon their shoulders and heads in dirty, impotent dribbles from rafters and upper floors. Old Crow tugged and knew that he was working alone on the line.

The fire ahead seemed to back away for a moment, then burst out brighter and peered around corners with hot, malevolent eyes. Green and blue shadows raced across its face; malicious lavender highlights spotted it. The crew of Engine 27 eased ahead languidly, one foot, two, four.

Captain Crow swung around on them furiously.

"Somebody holdin' your coat tails, maybe?" he wanted to know. "Got to carry ye along of me? If ye ain't got no push, leave go. I can't pull ye!"

The line jerked, fell back, gaining nothing.

"The smoke's awful thick," young Hume commented in a voice that proved it.

"Sure smoke's thick. Who's yellin' about that?"

Captain Crow yanked at the line and made two feet by himself. Barney was a good yard behind him now. Crow looked around, saw the firemen grinning at Burke, and reaching back with a snort, hauled him forward by his collar.

"See that landing?" he yelled. "Come along up, or I'll throw you up!"

They were twenty feet in from the door now, around two corners. There was no elbow room in the corridor. Smoke pushed down the stairs like broth. Above, fire fluttered coquettishly, ever in evidence, ever beyond reach.

To the right a door opened blackly upon a cellarway, out of which drifted strange, damp odors, chill airs that were gobbled up at once by hungry smoke. Small explosions like juvenile thunder rumbled up above, and plaster dust rained out of the ceiling. The heat pounded against five scorched faces. Barney slouched, and felt Captain Crow jerk him forward. He lifted the fireman bodily, set him down at the head of the line, and boosted him on from behind.

"Work there!" he panted.

It went no better. Six hundred gallons of water spurted out of the nozzle tip each minute, spattered lavishly against unoffending, uncharred beams, and washed down, worthless. The fire hid behind corners.

"You, Engine 27, what the devil you doing?"

No one, unless it were Hume, the recruit, need turn his hot face to discover the owner of that voice. It was Sparks McCullough, the marshal, the old man himself. Crow's men sprang into life.

"You're not getting at it!" the marshal accused. "You're wasting time here! Get up on that landing where your water will be some account!"

He was gone even before Captain Crow could stir his boots to obey. Then he lurched to his old place, kept Joe Barney beside him, and Engine 27 moved forward, crawled up the smoky stair and crouched, blistering, panting on the landing, thrashing chill water up at a howling, flaming vortex; scalded by that same water as it spattered back.

Kelly and Burke held silently to the pipe. Barney growled. Hume choked, cried out unashamed, groveled low over the throbbing fabric hose. Crow berated them, cursed them, urged them forward, belittled their gigantic efforts against the relentless fire, howled at their weakness.

"Shut up, Barney!" he cried once.

"I wasn't saying nothing—I was coughin'."

"Quit it!"

Barney lifted his scorched face and then dropped his head forward, protecting his eyes with the helmet rim. His lips, cracked open and bleeding in the heat, moved.

"Eh?" Crow shrieked. "What's that?"

"Go to the devil!" Barney enunciated clearly, above racket and roar.

Old Crow pushed out his hand, ready to strike. Kelly and Burke dropped the hose. The pipe swung madly, uncontrolled, thrashed against a baseboard, twisted, and flung itself full at Joe Barney's chest. The lean little fireman had half turned, facing his superior, waiting to ward off a blow.

But the crashing brass pipe was quicker than he, faster than a howling fire captain. It spilled Barney out across the landing, catapulted him down a narrow flight of stairs beyond, drenched him with chill water, and with a mighty yank tore through the other men and crashed back of them down the stair.

At the same moment Red Ranger's voice, pitched higher than the destructive voice of fire, squealed behind them.

"Engine 27, out! Quick there, get out!"

Discipline is an unbending mistress, however lax and loose it has grown. Captain Crow raced back obediently, taking three of his four men with him. The abandoned hose jammed into a corner, poured its flood upon the floor.

"It's got into the cellar, front," Red Ranger shouted by the entry.

"Ain't goin' to quit for that, are ye?" Old Crow spit out smoke contemptuously.

The battalion chief turned to Kelly.

"There's a thousand-gallon tank of denatured alcohol down there," he explained, "likely to go any minute. Can't drain it—"

"Where's Barney?" Crow demanded.

"Up where you knocked 'im!" Kelly answered.

Old Crow stared.

"I didn't knock him. Would of if I could." He turned on Ranger. "What you sayin'?" he demanded.

"Alcohol!" Ranger shouted. "Thousand gallons. Can't get at it."

Crow snorted.

"Tank got no valve?"

"Sure it's got a valve. Can't get at it, captain. Drain it into the sewer in five minutes if we could."

Captain Crow ran in to the stairway and gaped. He came back muttering.

"No sign of Barney." He turned on Ranger. "What you come tellin' me about alcohol for? I can't stop to drain it. One of me worthless apes is left up there!" He jerked his glove toward the stairway.

"Drag your hose outside, fight it from here," Red Ranger ordered. "If it lets go, run!"

The battalion chief was gone, galloping through the snow. He had not comprehended the captain's last remark. Old Crow picked up the line. He lugged it back into place alone, pushed Kelly and Burke toward it. Hume coughed, fell to his knees, staggered up again, coughed.

"You drive ag'in' that window," Captain Crow ordered. "Drive ag'in' that window, or I'll take ye 'fore the board. Stand up there, Kelly. I've gotta go. Gotta get that home guard!"

He panted into the door. Flame had followed their retreat down the stair. On his hands and knees like a rheumatic and overfed toad the commander of Engine 27 crawled back into the teeth of the fire. It lashed down on him with long, curving whips of flame. Twice he went forward, twice fell back. Again he tried. The blaze thrashed at his face. No sign of Barney. He stumbled, sprawled backward. No use trying upstairs. Man couldn't fall up.

By the cellar door he remembered Ranger's warning.

"By my faith, there's a mushroom!!" He stopped to cough. "Why don't he run down himself and turn that unfit alcohol out? I want to know!" His helmet was gone, so he scratched his head. There was still no sign of Barney.

Old Crow felt along the stairs with his boot. No man there.

"Just like a blasted second-class pipeman!" he muttered. "Losin' himself. Wisht I had knocked him!"

He felt his way carefully into the darkness of the basement. A collapsed section of floor let down fire far to the front. He could smell burning alcohol. It dripped somewhere, making a sputtering blue torch that sent ghastly lights and voluminous shadows scampering in a mad, hasty game. The alcohol tank, a long, black cylinder, blurred through the smoke. Captain Crow crawled along its side on his knees, hunting the valve, hunting Barney. He thought

he heard a man groan once. He paused, made out that the sound was a squeaking door, and hitched on.

He rounded the end of the tank at last, swearing, choking, cursing the builder of the burning old trap, cursing his company, cursing Barney, cursing the makers of what he called "shampoo."

He stopped short, his voice jammed in his throat. Some one was moving at the other end of the basement. The firelight spit out brighter. It was Barney—Joe Barney! He was on his feet, staggering, lost.

"Here, you roofian!" Crow cried out. "Get up that stairway or I'll throw you up!"

He stopped again to cough and hitched another length forward. His hand, searching in the shadows, came upon a heavy pipe suddenly, and a broad valve handle. He turned it hard, jerked twice. It started spinning with another twist. There was a sound of running liquid. Denatured alcohol began to flood the sewer.

Old Crow got up to his feet. He lurched toward Barney.

"Ain't ye out yet?" he bawled. "I told ye to get up them stairs, y' lazy goat! What you stayin' down here for, runnin' around in a room full o' unfit alcohol?"

He gripped the fireman's coat.

"There's the door. Left. Are ye blind? Where's your spunk? Left, I tell ye." He stopped abruptly. "Who's comin' in now?" he shouted.

Red Ranger, his helmet gone, hair singed, dropped down from a cellar window. He leaned against an iron pillar and vomited smoke.

"Well, for the love o' ladders, look who's come to help!" Captain Crow threw Joe Barney across his back and cuffed him once for good measure. "Best get out, chief," he said, more friendly. "The alcohol's runnin' into the sewer all right. But say—ain't it hot?"

He grabbed Ranger with his free hand and guided him toward the back stairway. "March!" he ordered. "Step out! I ain't a goin' to carry *you!*"

Ranger listened unoffended to his blasphemies. Up in the air, Old Crow released his chief's arm and stood a groggy Barney steady on his feet.

"In with ye, Engine 27!" he bellowed. "Ye skulkin' home guards, this here's a fire, it ain't a party. I turned the shampoo off!"

Swearing, belaboring his crew, driving them before him, Twenty-seven's leader took up his first position on the stair. Chief Red Ranger reported limply to the marshal, and firemen once more closed in.

It was dawn, a brittle, frigid morning, when the fire drew back sulkily from windows and truck companies climbed the roof to finish the wetting down. One by one the engine crews rolled up their hose and returned to quarters. In the apparatus room of Engine 27 Chief Red Ranger was questioning the men. Captain Crow had gone upstairs and was shaving.

"Did he knock you down?" Ranger asked. "Sure it wasn't an accident?"

Joe Barney rubbed his aching chest.

"Why, sir, chief, I couldn't say anything about the capt'n. Must of been an accident. I must of eat a lot of smoke—"

"And fell down cellar?" prompted Red Ranger.

"Course he did!" Kelly piped up. "Me and Burke seen it. Old Crow couldn't help it. Didn't he nigh explode himself gettin' old Barney out? He just lets out with his elbow, pushin' a hole in the smoke, and the pipe hits Barney. We got some boss, chief. Go anywhere. That's it, ain't it, Barney?"

"That was my understanding, too," the battalion chief said very solemnly. "Captain Crow did a good job there, men, finding that valve. He saved the whole neighborhood. No telling how many would have got it if that alcohol had let go."

He departed straight to the office of the fire marshal. And at ten o'clock that dignitary called Old Crow on the telephone.

"You, Crow? This is Sparks. Captain, that meeting of the board is off. Postponed. Yes, indefinitely. You ain't unfit. I'll say you ain't! That's all right. Don't mention it."

THE END

Live Bait

By ARTHUR LOCKWOOD

JOE BIGGLES looked about the deck, to assure himself that he was unobserved, then heaved a sigh. He looked out over the water, stellated by a thousand moon flecks and sighed again. Having sighed twice on that ship, without being put in irons, he sighed again and yet again.

They were deep, soulful flexions of his torso; but they were not induced by the sight of Coueron, so tiny it looked like a miniature village, lying before him in the Brittany moonlight. They were not sighs of relief because the ship—the four masted schooner Osiris—was riding safely at anchor in the Loire river, fifty miles inland from the tempests and treachery of the Bay of Biscay. They were such heavings as stir only the breast of mankind in love.

Ah, and the kind of love that had laid hold of Joe Biggles's soul was cut to measure; it was a ravaging, seething passion, that only a rugged and husky sailor could survive. Life, since Joe had first laid eyes on Germaine Voreau, had been a terrifying series of chimerical question marks and ghoulish exclamation points. It had transformed a ready-witted and fairly useful boatswain into a maundering day dreamer and a romancing mope.

The mate had noted the falling off in Joe's work with acute displeasure, and mentioned it to the skipper. The skipper greeted the news with a dour threatening countenance. Even in ordinary times, bad news made Captain Jedders irascible; but in those days when he lived in eternal fear of Mrs. Jedders, he especially desired that nothing outside his marital difficulties should require his attention.

But Joe, who was now leaning out over the rail and peering at the shadows along the shore, was unmindful that any one had ever given his woes a second thought, he only cursed the slowness of the boatman who was putting out from shore to get him.

When the boat came alongside, Joe's long

gangling figure slid down the monkey rope into the sternsheets, and the oarsman pulled him ashore. There is never much ceremony when a boatswain goes ashore, but there was less on this occasion—Joe saw to that—the reason being that he had been forbidden to leave the ship. The skipper, who did the forbidding, had committed the folly of picking out the night when Joe Biggles had the world's most momentous date. Joe might have endured the yoke of slavery, or even the leash, and still obeyed orders, but suspense he could not stand. Either Germaine would marry him, or—but she always smiled at him so prettily.

He met her on the *quai,* and they found a seat on a stone bench. The thrill at the sight of her became a rapture when she spoke. To look at her when the moonlight illumined her face beneath her fuzzy little hat, was to Joe an assurance that his eyesight was considerably more than normal. And it was a luxury to sit there watching the mellowed softness of her eyes, and the sense—prodding telepathy of her smile.

Yes, it would have been fine if Joe could only sit there, dumbly, and just look and listen. But he had a lucid moment, and during it, he recalled that he was there for the purpose of asking this ethereal creature to be his wife. What profanation and defamation of beauty!

He was suddenly both conscience-stricken and stage-struck. He felt like a man undergoing an intelligence test. His poor brain turned to jelly when he tried to think what words he would use, which the neater figure, what the surest compliment. The result was only the panicky conclusion that asking a girl to marry you is a thing that can't and shouldn't be done in the English language. He was fairly dizzy in his desperation, he stammered and mumbled incoherently.

"Swell weather—I mean the moon—light—" and he was lost. The silence that followed was excruciating. He must speak, though he could not think of an utterance.

"Ye know, I like—if you an' me—ye see, I been thinkin'—how are ye anyway?" He floundered in chagrin at his stupidity.

Perhaps nature rescues a man in a dire emergency, gives him the strength or ingenuity to save himself. In any event something very strange happened to Joe. His brain suddenly cleared, and became a flashing, edged thing. It formed in an instant every word of a perfect proposal and set up the shining text bold as a subway sign in his mind. With it even came strange but enlightening ideas for punctuation and emphasis. Yes, there on his tongue's end and clamoring for articulation was a classic matrimonial overture.

Gone were his embarrassment and awkwardness, he took a deep breath at the sudden realization of power—and talent.

"Ye know, Dutch,"—he had nicknamed her in an inspired moment—"I ain't allus been the respectable person ye think." His confidence was fairly chesty as he spoke.

"No?" said Germaine, "you not tell me somesing, hey?" She gave him an anxious look.

Joe noted the dramatic effect with self-congratulation.

"Naw," he continued with heavy seriousness, "I usta drink somethin' awful."

"W'y you stop—maybe you get seek, yes?"

"Sick, naw," replied Joe so quickly there was the intimation he resented the suggestion that he *could* get sick. "But I guess most people would 'a' got sick, if they lapped up as much binnacle polish as wot I did."

"You waire so ver' bad, hey?" Naïvely.

"Ye never saw nuthin' like it. Every time I'd git ashore, I'd wake up in jail nex' mornin', an' I'd never know how I got there."

Germaine regarded him perplexedly.

"I tell ye it was awful, I usta be seein' pink elephants and yella bicycles about half the time."

"Peenk elephants—ho-ho-ho," laughed Germaine.

Joe frowned upon her mirth; it was not the mood he wanted to create.

"But that's all over now," he went on, "since I saw you I ain't took a drink."

Germaine cooled about thirty degrees.

"Zat ees not compliment. You see peenk elephants, zey no make you stop dreenk, you see me you stop queek. I am so terr-r-ible, w'at?"

"Naw, naw," Joe hastened to assure her, "I laid off the booze so's I could show ye I kin stay sober if I wanta. I usta be lonesome, an' didn't have nobody t' think about. Then I saw you, an' ye was such a swell looker, an' I got stuck on ye, so I sobered up t' show ye I'd make a good husband, see."

"Husband! W'at you say?" Though she looked at him in wide-eyed surprise, there was a very distinct glow in those eyes.

"Husband, yeah. I wanta be yer husband. I'm cuckoo about ye? Now what I wanta know is, is they any use o' my keepin' on stayin' sober like this?"

"You want me for—wife?" She was vastly more credulous than she pretended.

"*Oui, beaucoup,*" said Joe with the evident double purpose of airing an accomplishment and getting himself understood.

"*Milliard des Dieux!* Me—wife for you?" More of that none-to-genuine surprise, and a mixture of sagacity. "You—you *sérieux?*"

"Serious as hell, ye little honeybunch ye, an' it'll be more serious if ye throw me down." A blind man could have seen that Joe meant every word and vastly more.

"You ver' kind to poor French girl," she said softly, "zat beeg compliment. I have not money, you want me for wife—me *seulement,* wizout money — you ver' fine Americaine. I say yes, I am mooch flattaire, I am glad to be wife for you—I be good wife too."

Joe's arms were around her, octopus-like. "Ye darlin' ye," he breathed with most unseamanlike tenderness, "I'm gonna be the world's champion husband too, ye beeootiful creecher."

Lovemaking having suddenly lost its perils, Joe embraced her with something like wild abandon. His masterly proposal had worked so efficaciously, he found himself seeking laurels as a sheik. Joe did not whisper endearments and clutivate soft tones with the grace of a courtier. In fact if any of his fellow sailors could have heard him then, a riot would have ensued.

Germaine seemed to have lost much of her gayety, the suddeness with which matrimony had obtruded in her affairs having made her thoughtful.

She listened while Joe, with his newly acquired eloquence, painted a picture of married life in Brooklyn that was nothing short of iridescent. He would soon be a second mate, the ship was going in the Maine lumber trade, so he would be home often and for long periods. Sooner or later he would be able to find a job ashore, as a rigger, which paid good wages. After that anything was possible.

"But maybe you dreenk," said Germaine.

This was a poser. That proposal hadn't been so good, for already her doubts of his sobriety were marring their bliss.

"Come to think about it," he replied, "I wasn't so bad as what I tried to make out. I was so anxious to tell ye all about myself, I guess I put a lot o' trimmings on it. As a matter of fack, I guess I been purty sober, as sailors go."

"You mus' not dreenk. You come home zeeg-zag, I go way." she said capriciously.

"I'm off the stuff fer life."

The liquor question thus disposed of, Joe resumed his testimonial that the United States was some place to live.

"Say, sweetie," he wanted to know as he reached the climax of his enthusiasm, "couldn't we git spliced to-morra. We kin git some frog preacher to put a seizin' on us."

Germaine understood him; Love is forever up to miracles. She understood him so well, that there was a hard cynical tone in her voice as she replied:

"Maybe you try to fool me, like so many Americaine fool French girl. Zey, w'at you call geet married, zen Americaine he go 'way no come back. Ha-ha, I am wot you call wise to ze Americaine."

"I'm bugs about ye, I'll come back if I hafta walk."

"All ze Americaine speek like zat, ze soldiers who marry French girl, ze sailors too. But zey forget. No, no, w'en Germaine *marier,* she go wis hoosband."

"We kin git married over here—"

"No, no, no, no, you take me America, zen I know you love me, zen we geet married."

Joe didn't blame her. Though he doubted that the French wives of American husbands who had flirted and forgotten

were so numerous as to constitute a social problem, he welcomed the opportunity of demonstrating his devotion.

Germaine's willingness to go, proved hers. At that moment Joe would gladly have chartered a yacht for her to make the trip, and thinking thus, he was rendered aware that transportation to the United States cost money.

Of course his bride-to-be had to go in style. He made a mental survey of his resources. He could draw half his pay, borrow something, and there was forty dollars stowed in his sea bag on board. The more he thought about it, the more difficult it became for him to discover wherein he could raise over a hundred dollars. It wasn't enough, but she could manage with rigid economy.

When he imparted the information of his financial shortcomings, she suggested they wait a trip. Wait! Might as well wait until they got into heaven. The ship probably would never come back to that port. She would go second class—or third.

"No," he said, "I'm gonna send ye right, if I hafta sell all the ship's stores to do it."

The first thing he did when he got back on board that night, was to break out his watch and consider its pawnability. He derived a world of joy out of the knowledge that somehow he would have money enough. His dreams of married life in Brooklyn were not disturbed by any worry about his solvency.

II.

MIKE WATTS was what might be called a scholarly ship's cook. He had read Mrs. Rorer's work with very meager benefit; and the literature of bartending extant failed to increase his knowledge. During those days that the ship lay in the Loire, Mike would have found life pretty dull if he hadn't turned his talents to original research.

That his experiments were concerned with homebrew, arose from his disappointment over the beer he found ashore. One argument with a café-keeper resulted in his declaration that if he could not make better beer than Coueron afforded, he would jump in the river. And his determination to make good amounted to a passion.

A tall earthen crock made its appearance around the corner of the cook's shack, and almost hourly Mike would lift the lid to look at the yeasty mash within.

One day, something besides fermentation happened to that mash. Mike lifted the lid, but did not gaze long and lovingly upon the barmy contents; instead he made a wry face and replaced the lid quickly. Somehow, something had got itself into an exceedingly bad state of preservation. Mike concluded that some one had disturbed it; had he known who he would have shot him.

It was sad, but by no means discouraged Mike, who dumped the contents of the crock overboard and prepared a new batch. He rose earlier than usual one morning to do it, and after he set the crock in place again, he carefully painted a sign to hang over it. It read:

DO NOT DISTURB

He looked for a place to hang it; there was no nail, so he hung the sign on the boatswain's doorknob near by, while he went forward to get one.

When Mr. Wade, the mate, came out on deck that morning his face telegraphed the fact that he had not had his breakfast. He was a lean, dyspeptic little man, and even in ordinary humor his face was a sour scowl. But now it was screwed up until it looked like a Benda mask, and in his eye glittered the signal that he was about as playful as an angry rattlesnake. His grouch was unique, however, in that there was a reason for it, in addition to the conventional empty-stomach motif. The skipper had lately been displaying a marked tendency to blame him for things that went wrong with the ship's work. And a generous sufficiency had gone wrong since the boatswain had embarked upon his highly original and colorful series of delinquencies.

"Damn that boson!" growled Mr. Wade. "Startin' t' lay down on me jest when the skipper is in a jam with his wife. Damn the skipper's wife! Damn the skipper! Holy hickey! Kin I help it if the boson goes bughouse on Cafy-cog-nack? Am I t' blame if the missus rides the skipper? Is that any reason why he's gotta

bawl me out? I knew this ship would turn out t' be a madhouse when I come in 'er. I tol' 'im not to bring 'er along this trip; it's jest as I said, nuthin' raises hell on a ship like a woman."

The storm center of Mr. Wade's bitterness, however, was the boatswain. If he hadn't developed uselessness, there would not have been anything the skipper could blame him for. What did that fellow think he could get away with, anyway? Mr. Wade resolved he would get some work out of Joe that day or— The thought was broken off; aye, it received a compound fracture at that point, for Mr. Wade's eye fell upon that distinct and unequivocal legend hanging on the boatswain's doorknob.

Mr. Wade gulped, made a face as though he had just swallowed a quart of gall, and stared. His mouth and nose twitched, his fists opened and closed convulsively.

"Do Not Disturb." He read it aloud to convince his nonplused faculties that it was real. "Dash the blankety blank ———! Kin ye beat that?"

When his reason was sufficiently restored he looked through the window and saw Joe lying in blissful oblivion on his bunk. There was a broad smile on Joe's lips; the dream was pleasant. A sonorous snore greeted Mr. Wade's ear. Mr. Wade turned and hastened aft. He left a wake of smoking gaseous language as he went.

The skipper was bent over the washbowl in the cabin when the mate burst in upon him, wearing an expression like a man who had just escaped from purgatory.

"Sufferin' sunfish!" ejaculated the skipper as he saw the impending fury on the mate's quaking lips. "Wot's happened?"

"I'm through, cap'n! I quit!" fairly screamed the mate. "I'm goin' right in now an' pack my dunnage."

"Bellerin' Bonitas!" spluttered the skipper, turning about, regardless of his dripping face and hands, to face the mate. Here was trouble, he was sure of that, but what particular form it had taken this time he couldn't guess. Plainly though it was something frightful. Above all things the skipper abhorred trouble. This outburst nearly made him ill.

The mate stood gulping, once more in the grip of emotions that would not permit utterance. When his tongue would again respond to the frantic urge of his brain he said:

"Come an' see fer yerself." He grabbed the skipper by the arm and led him out of the cabin. "Jest take a look at wot I got to contend with, then tell me if ye expeck me to stand for it."

The skipper felt as though something inside him turned to mercury. Surely nothing less than a bow stove in or a mast unshipped could anger the mate like this.

The skipper was already in a highly apprehensive and altogether miserable state due to the long threatened and calamity-portending explosion of Mrs. Jedders.

The mate pointed to the sign with a palsied finger.

"Jes' looka that, cap'n," he snarled. "If you expeck me t' stand fer that, you better hustle right ashore an' ship a new mate. Holy hickey! An' me tryin' t' git some work done!"

"Howlin' haddock!" roared the skipper. "Bring 'im aft! We'll log that bird so's 'e'll be owin' the ship money. Break 'im out an' bring 'im aft. Wot's he think this is, an excursion steamer?"

The skipper looked through the window and saw smiling Joe, still entirely occupied with blissful repose. The skipper, too, heard him snore, and answered it with a snort and a kaleidoscopic string of oaths. He seized the sign and sent it sailing overboard, then went aft to look up penalties in the Shipmasters' Legal Guide.

III.

THE skipper's ire considerably hampered his efforts to maintain a coldly judicial aspect when the thunderstruck Joe was led into the cabin.

"Wot's the charge?" asked the skipper, with a poor effort at formality.

The mate was not posted on felonious lore.

"A—er—neglect o' duty," he replied.

"Wot 'd I do?" asked Joe forlornly.

"Shut up!" chorused the skipper and mate.

" Neglect o' duty," repeated the skipper in dismay. " Ye call a stunt like that neglect o' duty?"

" Wot'd I do?" wailed Joe.

" In-in-subor'nation," ventured the mate.

The skipper replied with a contemptuous grunt.

" 'S mutiny, that's wot it is—look at 'im—mutiny an' slovenly appearance."

" Wot'd I do?" moaned Joe.

" Listen to 'im," snapped the skipper. " Listen to 'im have the gall to ask wot he did. Kiddin' us, addin' insult to injury. Thirty days' pay, an' if ye don't watch yer foot I'll put ye in irons. You let me know, Mr. Wade, if he does one little thing that ain't right, an' he'll go home in the hoosegow."

The mate and skipper fixed upon Joe such dark looks of outraged dignity and consternation as to very nearly convince him that he had tried to scuttle the ship. But a sure deep-water instinct prompted him to keep his mouth shut. Reasoning with his accusers in their present mood would be harebrained folly.

The continuity with which things had been happening since the irate mate had roused him from slumber had seriously impaired Joe's faculty of realization. It was not until he was back in his shack and sitting forlornly in his bunk that he was fully cognizant of how completely and utterly he was ruined.

Thirty days' pay!

Two days would have made a serious void in his finances; even with five days deducted he might still contort his poor brain into a semblance of hope; but that thirty-day catastrophe left him and his matrimonial project in about the same plight as a tunnel digger when the mountain has caved in behind him.

He thought of the night before and the attending enchantments; he thought—poignantly—of his situation now. And as each miserable minute dragged by the oppression of his thoughts became greater. A specimen of these thoughts was: that the nearest point in the United States was three thousand miles away; that the North Atlantic is too wide and cold and gloomy to try to swim, especially for a lady. But what made him shudder was a momentary consideration of steamship rates. He began to wish he couldn't swim, so that he could jump overboard with comforting effect.

IV.

THE skipper, addressing the mate in the cabin, was in the midst of an inspired indictment of all sailors and boatswains, when Mrs. Jedders was heard stirring in her stateroom. She being the one human being the skipper feared, and a serious check on his iron-handed rule of the ship, the skipper lowered his tones.

Lowered tones were not meet, however, to express himself, so he whispered to the mate:

" Let's git outa here 'fore she comes in." He looked anxiously toward her door. " She's li'ble to gimme fits fer wakin' her up."

They repaired to the mate's room.

" It's terrible," said the skipper, when they were seated. " I tell ye somethin's gotta be done. I'm gonna make sailors outa this crew if I hafta kill about half of 'em."

" Somethin's gotta be done," assented the mate.

" I know wot's wrong with 'em," went on the skipper. " They need some snappy drill. If the missus hadn't made me stop havin' them man-overboard drills every night we wouldn't be havin' sailors puttin' up signs like that. I tell ye nuthin' peps up discipline like drills."

The mate's face fell. He shrugged.

" I tell ye wot, we'll start this man-overboard drill to-night agin," added the skipper.

The mate did not greet the suggestion with wild approval. During these drills, which were held at midnight, he himself had to be on deck, and he was a wholehearted sleeper.

The drill consisted of throwing a dummy over the stern, then rescuing it. The dummy was the skipper's brain child, and he had it made with great care by the carpenter, who labored for days to get a lifelike effect. The skipper had even ordered

that a tarpaulin be kept over it when it was out in the weather, to protect it from the elements. Thereafter the skipper had become an inordinate man-overboard enthusiast, and the frequency of the drills had been the bane of the crew's existence—also Mr. Wade's.

"I dunno," said Mr. Wade.

"Sure, it 'll put new pep into 'em," enthused the skipper.

The mate essayed to discourage him. "The missus—" he began.

The skipper's face clouded.

"That's right," he said. "She'll raise hell." He scratched his head. At length he brightened. "I'll beat it ashore, git out from under the guns, then you kin have the drill. She won't say nuthin' to you. Ye see, somethin's gotta be done, the state o' discipline is awful."

The mate's silence denoted acquiescence, but his face extreme reluctance. He waited until after the skipper had gone ashore, before he ordered the dummy made ready for drill and put in place on the poop. When the word was passed among the crew there were covert scowls and growls. Their humor did not improve as the midsummer sun rose higher and beat down with intense heat upon the decks. The breezeless atmosphere became insufferable. The mate sweltering with the rest, cursed the skipper's whims. At least, he wished the skipper could discover a scheme for disciplining sailors that didn't involve himself so completely.

In the afternoon, when the heat had made a suffocating oven of the cabin, Mrs. Jedders, a portly, formidable dame, came on deck to sit under an awning that had been rigged over the mizzen boom. The mate saw her and bowed.

"Hot, ain't it, Mrs. Jedders?" he remarked.

"Awful," she answered. "I thought I'd roast alive in that cabin."

The mate was not above a bit of double-dealing in the interests of reason.

"Seems kinda too bad," he began speculatively, "to break the crew out to-night, after they been workin' in this heat all day."

Mrs. Jedders smelled smoke.

"Break them out? What for?" she asked imperiously.

The mate explained his orders, pussyfooting with great care.

"Ye'll do no sech thing," she said severely. "I'm gonna sleep on the poop to-night—can't stand that cabin. And I'll not be woke up by any sech monkey-shines."

"But them's the captain's orders," rejoined Mr. Wade, wishing to build his alibi on a firm foundation.

"If he ain't aboard, what he don't know won't hurt 'im, will it?" she responded.

Again Mr. Wade was acquiescent, and not so reluctant.

"No—it wouldn't," he said.

However, Mr. Wade had a decided proclivity to play safe. There was always the possibility, the skipper might change his mind and come back aboard. Mr. Wade left orders with the lookout to call him at once if he saw the captain coming. His game was to serve two masters, if one wasn't present.

V.

JOE'S despair, as he went ashore that night, had reached the stage where it groped for alternatives. He would tell Germaine the truth, then—well, there was the flowing bowl, and if that failed, the flowing river.

She listened to him gravely. When he had finished his recital of woe and was raving wild lamentation, she cocked a quizzical eye at him. He declared he would jump ship and starve in France, just so he could be near her.

"Ah-ha, eet ees so w'at I zought. You no wan' take me to America. You wan' fool Germaine." And she burst into tears.

"Ye gods, sweetie, don't say that. How kin I? That thirty days' pay leaves me flat."

There was abysmal silence.

"I'd do anything—anything—"

"Anysing but take me to America," and she wept again.

It stung Joe to the marrow. His helplessness to convince her gave him the feeling of a drowning man; and, like the drowning man, he clutched at a straw.

"They's only one thing we kin do," he said, "if ye'll do it."

"W'at's zat?" she answered, drying her tears.

"I'll stow ye away in the ship!"

"Hey?"

He explained stowing away with as much favorable embellishment as possible. He expected the worst, but when Germaine brightened and clapped her hands in glee, as though he had merely invited her to a picnic, that much frayed remnant of hope surged through him again.

"Ye'll do it?" he asked breathlessly, unable to trust the signs.

"Me love you—me do w'at you say—anysing, you beeg *merveilleux* Americcaine."

Joe now had to reorient himself to the fact that events were still tending in the general direction of their nuptials and to reconcile himself to a devotion so profound that his sweetheart would even stow away in order to go with him.

Germaine was no heiress, her occupation being that of a clerk in a shop where Joe bought cigarettes. All the belongings she saw fit to take for stowing away purposes were carried in a little hand bag.

Joe, after a careful reconnaissance, rowed her out to the ship and quietly helped her aboard. Hiding in the shadow of the bulwarks, he again looked about to see that the coast was clear. He could make out the shadowy figure of the sailor on watch on the forecastle. He was evidently the only person awake.

Joe led Germaine aft, up a companionway, where a huge locker near the wheel afforded a place for her to hide until he could go below and make the lazaret a fit place for his love to abide the night. He knew also that it was near eight bells and he wanted to wait until the watch had changed.

VI.

THE shoregoing of Captain Jedders that day proved to be dismally uninteresting. There were no other ships in port, consequently no sea captains with whom to talk about ships. He had some business at the agent's office in the afternoon, for the vessel was to sail the following day. After that was over he wandered about like a man lost. He didn't know what to do with himself; he was as bored as a Young Intellectual at a camp meeting.

Literally was he a fish out of water. He couldn't stay still, and when he moved he gravitated in a single direction: toward the water front.

Before midnight he was out on the end of a pier, looking pensively at the dingy wraith of the Osiris, a jet-black outline in the gray night. It was ironical that the only fun the skipper was going to have ashore would be watching and timing, from this vantage point, the man-overboard drill. He looked at his watch frequently and waited.

When he heard eight bells clang on the forecastle he snatched out his watch. As was the custom, eight bells would be followed by the bellow of the general alarm. The skipper waited. The hand that held his watch was feverish and trembling with expectant agitation. The Prince of Wales was never more excited at the finish of a steeplechase.

The skipper waited—and he waited—and then—nothing happened!

The skipper wondered, but not long. He understood. He declaimed an epic of salt water profanity; he was just about the maddest man in all the ports of the Western Ocean. Hell of a ship that was getting to be! Wasn't bad enough for boatswains to be hanging out signs; but the whole crew conspired to make a monkey out of him and a joke of his orders.

"Cryin' codfish! An' I recommended that low-lived, double-crossin' mate fer a cap'n's job! That's gratitude, that is!"

He was a human blast-furnace of wrath as he procured a boat and put out to the ship. For the moment he had forgotten Mrs. Jedders in his choler engendered by a lazy, useless crew, and a perfidious mate who would deliberately flout his orders. As he climbed aboard he intended, first, to fire the mate, then put the whole crew in irons, then—

The deafening howl of the man-overboard signal interrupted his intentions. The sailor on watch had not been watchful. He hadn't seen the skipper until he

was close aboard; he recalled his instructions to call the mate, but realized it was too late. It would be just like the skipper to blame him for failure to sound the alarm. There was just one chance to save his own skin.

He ran to the fog-horn and ripped up the night with its shriek.

There was panic, there was pandemonium, there was indescribable confusion as all hands leaped from their bunks and ran on deck. They were leaderless, for Mr. Wade had stopped for sufficient time to put on his pants.

The two sailors charged with throwing the dummy overboard ran on deck, saw the skipper, and made a frantic dash to the stern. They grabbed for the dummy blindly, madly. They lifted, they heaved, and let go.

A wild scream rent the air.

"Gawd! We've thrown the old woman overboard!" groaned one of the sailors.

"Help!" yelled another sailor.

"Jumpin' crawfish!" yelled the skipper. "That's the missus. Git me ashore quick! No, let 'er go—all hands an' the cook aloft —no—"

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" yelled Joe, dashing out of the after companionway. "That's my girl."

He didn't pause to consider the situation, but took two leaps and a high jackknife dive over the rail.

"Shudderin' shad!" said the skipper to the mate. "Git me out of this 'fore she gits aboard!"

How he regretted having come aboard! Why hadn't he waited a little longer before jumping at the conclusion—the terribly egregious conclusion that his orders were not obeyed.

He looked over the rail and saw Joe swimming and towing the spluttering and flailing figure of Mrs. Jedders toward the ship.

"Wailin' weakfish!" he moaned. "Won't I ketch it now? Git me outa here, somebody!"

Mrs. Jedders was quickly on board again, and as she paused, dripping, on deck, her blazing eyes roved about for the skipper. They found him, and he cringed before their blinding fire. She seized a marlinspike, she advanced.

"You—you idiot!" Her voice shook. "You misbegotten old—"

She stopped suddenly, for there had just stepped into the beam of the cargo light the slight, fairylike figure of a girl. It was a sight to astonish any one, but it made Mrs. Jedders forget husband, idiocy, even her dripping nightclothes.

"Who's that?" she asked. "A woman! What's she doing aboard this vessel?"

"Holy hickey!" cried Mr. Wade.

"Squealin' squid!" the skipper found voice to exclaim.

Germaine had, when she saw two husky sailors dash aft and throw a lady overboard, become somewhat concerned about her own safety and had run out on deck. In the excitement she hadn't been noticed until the eagle eye of the missus had fallen on her.

Joe, now a living lament over his wrecked hopes, decided that the last act before commencing his certain life term would be to save Germaine embarrassment. Mrs. Jedders was looking at her with something like a cannibalistic gleam in her eye.

"That's my girl," said Joe, stepping beside Germaine and throwing a protecting arm around her. "'S all my fault she got aboard here. I was tryin' to stow her away —no, it ain't wot ye think—we was goin' to be married. I wouldn't 'a' done it, only the cap'n had to go an' log me thirty days' pay, so's I couldn't pay her passage to the States. An' he logged me fer nothin', too!"

Mrs. Jedders's face suddenly took on a strange softness. Her feelings were mingled gratitude to Joe for fishing her out of the river, but something deeper within her was stirred. She felt herself suddenly in the grip of romance, a spirit was reanimated within her that made her recall her own courtship days. She actually smiled—beamed upon Joe and Germaine.

"Now, ain't that the cutest thing?" she cooed.

The skipper saw that smile, and his hope of salvation. He could tell that peace was once more restored and that his accountability for her having been thrown overboard was forgotten.

"Ain't it?" assented the skipper with fervid readiness.

"Must ye log the pore fella, jest when he's goin' to be married?" she asked.

The miracle! She was *asking* him, *wheedling* him. "She's so purty!" added Mrs. Jedders.

The skipper scratched his head.

"That sign business was awful serious," he remarked. He told the details.

Mike Watts heard him.

"That was my sign," said Mike. "I put it there—he wasn't to blame for that. Gee whiz, an' I beat up a sailor this afternoon, thinkin' he threw it overboard on me."

"That's how it was, eh?"

"So—I thought it kinda funny," said Mr. Wade.

"Isn't she a darlin'?" said Mrs. Jedders, holding out welcoming hands to Germaine. "She's gonna be my guest all the way home." She turned to the skipper with matchmaker's benignity. "You kin marry them, we kin have the weddin' on board. Won't that be jest too cute fer words!"

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE AUTOMATIC SPEAKS

I'M the blue-black automatic.
Deadly, even if erratic,
Is the guy who grabs me in a sweating fist.
I'm a pretty certain mower,
If the other man is slower;
At a reasonable range I've seldom missed.

In a mix-up I'm a dinger—
Like old Omar's moving finger,
Having writ, who stood before me passes on.
And the squeezing of my trigger
Makes a runt just six times bigger
Than a husk who has it over him in brawn.

I'm the blue-black automatic,
With a voice that's most emphatic.
When I speak with smoke and flame in trench or street.
And for those who fail to get me—
If my master just will let me—
I am usually willing to repeat.

When the trouble starts to brewing,
I am always up and doing.
I'm a real friend in a jam—if it's not mine.
And though crooks and gunmen use me,
And my enemies abuse me—
For a good man first I'll sure go down the line!

Fairfax Downey.

Smart as an Ox

By TOM CURRY

IT was a shining spring day and the black road glistened with the morning dew. Back of the little unpainted garage stretched timberless fields of huckleberry bushes just peeping forth in the warm air, and through the fields, dipping slightly as it crossed a small stream over a wooden bridge, ran a narrow dirt road.

There were few trees of any size, and they were second-year birch and maple, or else charred stumps that had not altogether perished in the devasting forest fires of preceding years. In the distance were the rolling hills of the Poconos, a large cloud of white mist some miles away rising into the air and betraying the presence of a lake.

The garage stood on a curve of the main road at the summit of a steep decline. In the doorway, sunning himself, sat Peter Berger, a large, heavy man, with Teutonic cast of features and innocent blue eyes. Beneath his dirty gray shirt his muscles bulged mightily. He was listening to the chirping of the robins on the telephone wires with one ear and with the other to his employers, Johnny Kratz, " boss " of the outfit, and Eddie Dunny, his partner.

There were no houses in sight, only a small oil-shed a few yards from the main building. A dilapidated Ford drawn to one side and a bicycle leaning against the shed showed the means by which the three came to work.

Nursing a disemboweled Ford truck, their jumpers covered with black grease, Johnny Kratz and Dunny conversed merrily, smoking their charred pipes.

" Yessir, it was hard work a-raisin' that five hundred, Dunny, but now we got it. We're all fexed fer another half year. Sure felt good to git my hands on that cash."

The garage was a struggling establishment in its first year; and the money to pay off the interest and part of the principal of the mortgage had been hard to find. But by scraping and saving and a little borrowing from friends, the partners had managed to accumulate enough cash for the payment. Another six months would see them on their feet, as the spring and summer months were prosperous ones, due to the summer folk who came to live along the lake shore.

" We gotta raise th' engin', an' th' pulley's busted," said Dunny, a small, wiry man with dark eyes and black hair. His

companion was larger and stockier, with intelligent brown eyes and a large head.

"Peter," called Johnny.

The big man in the doorway rose ponderously and shifted his heavy bulk across the oil-stained floor of the workshop.

"Give 's a hand,'' ordered Johnny. "Want to lift th' engin'—not the hull car, just where I show you."

"Aw right, boys," said the big fellow, meekly, seizing the part indicated by his employer and exerting his strength. Dunny and Kratz aiding, he lifted the engine from the frame and placed it on two sawhorses arranged for the purpose. Then he wiped his hands on the seat of his overalls and resumed his place in the sun.

But he had not long to rest. A buzzing sound came from round the bend and presently a small car, bearings knocking loudly, hove into view. The driver was a native of the mountain country, and after exchanging a word with Dunny and Kratz, who came out for the purpose, he ordered Peter to fill the gasoline tank. The latter did this from a small red pump which stood by the side of the road.

His task finished, Peter stood smiling amiably at the driver of the car.

"Well, Peter, how you like bein' a mechanic," said the latter jovially.

It was well known that Berger was ignorant of machinery. It was a marvel to all who knew him that he had ever learned to ride a bicycle. As Kratz said, he was strong as an ox and about as smart. But he could pump gasoline into the tanks of the cars that came by and was generally handy about the place. Of course, the partners might have found some one else more useful; but they felt sorry for the big fellow.

Soon, after the noisy little machine had gone on, the postman and milkman went past. Then, as the quiet morning wore on, Peter smoked with his eyes closed, listening lazily to the partners as they hammered away, talking and singing.

At ten o'clock the two workers knocked off work and joined Peter, who had already taken out his lunch and begun to eat. It was a custom among them to eat half the contents of heir pails in the middle of the morning, as they were very early risers. At noon they would finish their lunches and at five go home to a large supper. They were hearty eaters and as it was one of their joys, they practiced it as often as possible.

"You sure you got that cash safe, Johnny?" inquired Dunny, biting into an apple tart and taking a large gulp of coffee from the top of his pail. "Seems too good to be true we got it all."

"Yeh, it's safe, in that there can on the shelf in the office. Couldn't nothin' happen to it, Dunny. Don't be so foolish."

They had finished eating and were loading their pipes preparatory to returning to work, when the soft purring of a motor reached Dunny's sharp ears and soon a big blue, gray-topped touring car shoved its nose into view around the bend.

"Here comes some customers," said Kratz, watching the car and praying it would stop. "Listen at his valves. He's havin' trouble—or will have before he gits far."

The big car had almost passed by before it suddenly swerved to the left and drew up at their feet.

"Morning," said the driver, a little, wizened man, whose gray overcoat partially covered a checked suit and a loud necktie. "You fellows know anything about this make of car?"

"Sure," said Dunny. "We know ev'rything there is t' know."

The little man's companion was larger, with furrowed brows and a scowling countenance.

"Let 'em fix it, Lou," he said. "We got time."

Both the strangers got out and stretched themselves, and Kratz, standing up, said, "I'll just run 'er inside. Open the doors, Peter."

"Come far?" inquired Dunny sociably.

"Just made the run from Scranton," said the little man. He seemed to be the spokesman of the party. "George," he added to his companion, "let's walk up and down and get warm. It's cool driving this morning."

"Come inside," invited Dunny.

Peter had been regarding the newcomers

with a stare of wonder. Such magnificence in dress could only be displayed by extremely rich men, he thought. He watched them follow Dunny inside the building; but soon the buzz of conversation became too complex for him to gather in, so he closed his eyes.

As they worked, the two partners talked with the customers. They were famous for their small talk, and one of the joys of a broken car—if there are any—was to hear them as they went about their business. The summer people enjoyed it immensely.

"Me 'n Johnny was down to Scranton Thanksgiving," Dunny was saying. "You know a girl named Dottie White? She lives on Ell-um Street and she sure is a nice kid."

"No, we don't live in Scranton; we just passed through there," said the little man. "We come from Buffalo. On our way to New York."

"Me 'n Dunny go down to New York ev'ry Christmas time," offered Johnny. "We sell Christmas trees. We put up at the Men's Hotel in Hoboken. Ever been there?"

The little man smiled. "Can't say that I have. I've been in Hoboken, though—worse luck."

Here was a topic of mutual interest and for a time Johnny dilated on the subject; then, the little man, with a wink to his companion, said:

"Seems a shame for two bright fellows like you to be shut off here in the mountains. Don't you get tired of it?"

"Oh, sometimes," admitted Dunny. "But we got lots of amusement. Ever try runnin' a garage? Me 'n Johnny has on'y been at it about a year and it sure is excitin'. We just managed to scrape together enough cash to pay off our mortgage."

"You've paid it, eh."

"No, not yet. But we got it O. K. What fer you hittin' me with that wrench, Johnny?"

"'Scuse me," said Johnny. "Nice weather, ain't it," he added, trying desperately to change the trend of the conversation.

"Guess we'll step out and have a smoke." said the little man, after a moment. "Let's go, George. I want to sniff the mountain air."

When they had passed out of hearing, Johnny turned on Dunny. "What fer you want to go tellin' 'em 'bout our money?" he demanded. "Want to lose it?"

"Aw, don't be so crazy. Ain't goin' to do no harm. They're real gents. Look how they're dolled up."

Presently, the two customers came in again.

"That's a funny chap out there," remarked the one called Lou. "He seems stupid and yet he's interesting."

"That's Peter," said Dunny. "He's dumb but he's purty strong and we give him a job to help him out durin' the spring. In the summer he works over to the lake. He's got a good heart—but his head's sort of solid. Half the time he don't understand what you tell him. T' other day Johnny told him to fetch the wrench out of the blacksmith's truck and damn' if he don't come back carryin' a winch that was in the back. Must have weighed over a hundered pounds, too."

The two laughed and watched while Johnny adjusted a valve. "Take much longer?" inquired George.

"Nope," said Johnny. "Be ready in twenty minutes."

"We'll need some gas, too, I reck'n. And a quart of medium oil. Where's this little dirt road behind you go to?"

"That road? Oh, it sweeps down past the lake and then out onto the State road again. It cuts off some five miles on the way to the city, as the tar road passes through the village and winds round a lot."

"Can we get through that way?"

Dunny looked inquiringly at his partner.

"Sure," said Johnny, "I guess. 'Tain't used much but it's good 'n' solid. Bridge there ain't so strong, though. We go over it in our Ford easy enough. Hey, Peter! Go down and fex the bridge fer the gentlemen."

"Aw right."

They heard the big fellow rise from his place in the doorway and lumber away. Through the window they caught a glimpse of his burly figure as he passed along the dirt road.

"He'll fex it aw right," said Dunny. "There's some planks down there we left fer the purpose. Intended doin' it soon."

"Peter seems a little stupid," observed the little man. "Don't suppose he knows much about what goes on, does he?"

"Naw. He just does what he's told, that's all. Wouldn't do nothin' of his own accord if he was standin' in a fores' fire."

Presently Johnny straightened up. "There," he said. "She'll go now. Push 'er out, Dunny."

Together they shoved the car out of the shop and steering it from the ground, brought it within reach of the gasoline pump. Then Dunny pumped until the car's tank registered full while Johnny put some oil in the engine.

"You're ready to go now," said Johnny, wiping his hands.

"How much do I owe you?" asked the little man.

"Oh—two dollars fer the work and a dollar and a half fer the oil 'n' gas."

The little man reached in his pocket, but instead of pulling out money he extracted a thirty-two caliber revolver which he proceeded to point at Johnny.

"How much money have you got?" he said quietly. "Hand it all over."

"Why, you—" began Dunny, but he faced a similar greeting in the hand of the man called George.

"Snap it up," ordered George, scowling more ferociously than ever.

"Ain't got any money," said Johnny, looking innocent.

"You hold 'em, George," ordered Lou.

Quickly he went through the partners' pockets. Nothing was revealed but some loose change, a couple of wrenches and packets of tobacco.

"It's inside, George. I'll find it quick enough. I know where these hicks hide their cash. If anybuddy comes, back 'em inside—bring 'em in anyhow."

Johnny and Dunny, their hands raised above their heads, walked miserably into their castle, and watched while the little man made a quick and efficient search of their small office and in a tin can, set to one side of the shelf, found five hundred dollars in dirty bills of small denomination.

"Aw right," said Lou. "We'll padlock 'em in the office. We'll be on our way before they can get out. Tear up that telephone wire, George."

George did as he was bid; then, with a push, Johnny and Dunny were sent sprawling into the little office and the padlock snapped on the door.

"Well, you're a fine guy," wailed Dunny, "to let a couple of slickers like them trim us. Fine pair of suckers we are—the boys will laugh us to death—and now we ain't got any money to pay our mortgage."

"Aw, shut up," growled Johnny. "Who told 'em we had any cash in the first place."

Out of the little window they saw the blue car winding along the dirt road, gathering speed.

"It's a heavy car; maybe they'll break through the bridge," said Dunny hopefully.

"Naw; we told Peter to fex the bridge. Damn it, let's git out of here."

With a sledge, he demolished the wooden door. In one corner of the shop stood a double-barreled shotgun, and from a drawer Johnny took some shells and loaded it. Putting two or three more in his pocket, he ran out the door.

"Ain't no chanst to catch 'em," said Dunny following. "They'll be miles away 'fore we can git help. Prob'ly a stolen car, too, and they'll change in Stroudsburg. It's gone, Johnny. And to think we let ourselves git cheated so easy!"

But Johnny was pressing on, and turning the corner of the building he looked down the road.

"Out of sight a'ready—" he began, then he uttered a cry. "No, they ain't. They're there, Dunny."

Level with the bank, where the road crossed the stream by a ford, in use before the building of the bridge, they saw the dusty gray top of a car. Johnny started running, shouting at the top of his voice, with Dunny after him.

Peter's large head appeared above the bank of the stream and he appeared to be trying to catch the partners' words.

"Stop 'em, stop 'em," shouted Johnny, waving his arms.

Peter nodded and disappeared again. By the time they could see him, he was at the

back of the car, pushing it through the water toward the opposite bank.

"He's helpin' 'em," groaned Dunny. "He's too dumb to live."

The little man, in the driver's seat, heard them coming, and turning, discharged a revolver at them. The bullets, however, went wild, and Johnny and Dunny were too excited to think of danger.

The car was almost across the stream when Peter seemed to realize something was wrong. The firing of the revolver by the little man was too much for even his dull brain not to understand, and he stopped pushing the mired car, and stepping to the front, tore open the front door.

The little man fired again, this time at Peter, and the other thief, opening the door on his side, sprang away and ran down the creek bed. But Johnny, used to bringing down rabbits with a single shot of a rifle through the head, took hasty aim and fired. The thief, receiving the buckshot as it spread, leaped into the air and turned with a cry of pain on his pursuers. He answered their fire with a revolver; but another shot from Johnny's gun this time at closer range made him lose his footing, and as he slipped the revolver flew into the air and plunked into the water.

In the meantime, Peter was attending to the fellow who had shot him. With one powerful wrench, he dragged the little man from his seat, raised him above his head and dashed him to the bed of the stream. The thief lay gasping for breath, his mouth filled with sand and water. Peter stood over him, breathing heavily, and nursing a wound in his thick neck.

"He shot me, Johnny," he explained, as Kratz came to his side.

"He's a crook, that's what he is." said Johnny. "Where's that money, you monkey-faced galoot."

Dunny was searching the other, and he cried out: "I got it, Johnny."

Kratz quickly reloaded his shotgun and they marched the prisoners up the bank toward the garage, Peter stumbling along in the rear.

"Hurt much?" inquired Johnny, seeing the blood on the big fellow's neck.

"Nope," said Peter. "Just stings some, that's all."

The two thieves were muttering imprecations, but a little rough treatment from Johnny and they obeyed him without trouble. He put them in the rear of the Ford with Dunny and Peter, and then they all drove to the sheriff's office in the village. George was bleeding in several places, dabbing at his wounds with a handkerchief, and the little man, shivering damply, sat with bent head, his eyes closed.

The sheriff took charge of the prisoners, and then the partners drove to the doctor's, where Peter's wound was dressed. Two hours later, after giving a thrilling account to admiring villagers, they returned to the garage.

"Let's go down and see that there car," said Johnny. "Must be a reward out for it, as it's prob'ly a stolen one."

"Wonder why they didn't go right over the bridge," said Dunny.

"Why," said Peter, looking at him with his round eyes, "they couldn't use the bridge, Dunny."

They did not understand what he meant; but when they arrived they saw something they had not noticed in the excitement of the fray: A crowbar lay near by, and the little wooden bridge had been moved from its moorings and was partially pulled back on the road toward the garage. There was a gap of two feet between the far end and the opposite end of the road.

"What the hell happened here?" exclaimed Johnny.

"I done that," said Peter. "Those fellers wanted to cross but couldn't 'count of my movin' it. It was a turrible job, boss, and I'm glad I don't have to finish it; though, if you say so, I will."

"You're a good boy, Peter," said Johnny. "I'll give you some extra cash this week for your work to-day. But what the hell were you doin' to the bridge? I told you t' fex it fer them fellers and here you've pulled it cockeyed."

"You told me t' fex it?" Peter smiled foolishly, and then beamed goodnaturedly. "Say, Johnny, I thought you tol' me t' *fetch* it."

THE END

Here's My Husband

By CHARLEY WOOD

"I NEVER seen a sailor who weren't figgering on making his last cruise," said the ship's cook. He turned away from the slop chute with his empty bucket and waddled back to the galley door, his fat, aproned body jiggling, jellywise.

"The longer the cruise they make the more they brag how they're going to step ashore and say good-by to ships forever. I've even seen 'em stay aboard in foreign ports, saving their money, so's to have a lot of pay coming when they got back to home port, intending never to go to sea no more. But somehow the plans they spend so long making don't seem to work out like they expected.

"Bill Smith had that experience. Bill was a bos'n and had just finished a year's cruise on one of them big steel-hulled square-riggers with skys'l lifts that scraped the clouds in bad weather. Him and the sailmaker and the ship's carpenter was old cronies together. But all during the cruise Sails and Chips 'ud gone ashore without the bos'n, who was staying aboard saving his money to quit the sea.

"The day fin'ly come when sails was stowed and everybuddy packing dunnage for shore in New York harbor. The bos'n already had his dunnage packed, having been prepared for six months, and was setting on the combing of the fore hatch with a whole year's pay in his pocket. But there was kind of a worried look in his eyes as him and the ship's carpenter and the sailmaker talked back and forth together.

"'Done with the sea, that's what I am,' the bos'n says. 'No more of this heaving out watches on floating madhouses and breaking poor sailors' hearts with fool orders from aft. Me for a nice, peaceful, quiet time now, with mates and sea lawyers outa my life forever.

"'First,' he says, 'I'm going to some summer resort hotel and stay a week or so, resting and ashoshating with the kind of

people I should uv been ashoshating with all my life. Then, after a nice soshul week, I'll look for a job where a man don't haf to work hard or stand mid-watches. If you two had stayed aboard like I done you'd have what I got to look for'd to now.'

"The sailmaker and the ship's carpenter looked at him sort of sad, making up their minds their next cruise 'd be their last, too.

"'But there's one thing that worries me,' the bos'n went on. 'I can't get married. I'm doomed to bachelorhood, even with a whole year's pay in my pocket.'

"The ship's carpenter and the sailmaker knew why. They had heerd Bill tell the story many a time of how he 'ud married all of fifteen years ago a beautiful girl. But he had run off to sea and left her. Never had he seen or heerd of her since, look like he would. He'd give up the hunt years ago. He had even forgot for sure what she looked like except that she was a blonde, because he'd been a' nawful repperbate in his day and his memories of ladies was somewhat mixed.

"'You oughta be ashamed,' the ship's carpenter says, 'to be living in luxury at a pleasure resort with all that money, and your poor wife prob'ly starving and melting in the hot city.'

"'How can I help it?' the bos'n says. 'Ain't I looked hard for her?'

"'Life ashore ain't so good nowadays anyhow,' says the sailmaker, spiteful-like, 'with all this pro'bition and robbery going on. Sometimes I think a man's safer off on a ship.'

"'If I didn't have no more to do than a sailmaker mebbe I wouldn't be quitting the sea, neither,' the bos'n says.

"'Ain't we going to have some kind of a good-by work up, Bill?' asts the ship's carpenter. 'Here's poor Sails and me with only a month's pay and the rotten sea to look for'd to. We oughter give you some kind of a send-off.'

"'You two got yourselfs to blame,' says the bos'n. 'You'll be ashore about three days and all your money 'll be squandered. And when it's gone,' he says, speaking up loud, hoping them aft 'ud hear it, 'don't try to borrer from me, who's saved his money and is done with ships and sailors.'

"But the ship's carpenter and the sailmaker kep' on arguing, and he fin'ly give in and let 'em go ashore with him, saying he'd only stay a few minits and then go to his summer resort.

"The first fool thing they done was to go inter a place that uster be a saloon, but was now a' nice cream parlor, where they set down and begin eating ice cream sundaes with all differunt colors of flavors. It was a sad sight, them big hands that 'ud held many a glass without trembling, trying to balance cherries on little silver spoons.

"Whilst they was doing this a young man come in and set down to the table with 'em.

"'How many of them sundaes have you e't now, skippers?' he asts.

"'What's that to you?' the bos'n says.

"'Nothing,' the young man says, 'only I'm a reppersentative of one of the evening papers and the city editor is curious to know what deep-sea sailors does with their money now since pro'bition.'

"Then Bill done another fool thing by getting inter conversation back and forth with him, not knowing reporters. The first thing off he begins telling him his story about his lost wife, and never having had such a int'rested listener before, he kind of outstepped hisself and exaggerated the money he had. He told how he was retiring from the sea to live a quiet, luxerus life, but how he could never be happy with all his money and no wife to help share it, and how he 'ud even forgot what she looked like, except she was blond.

"'Sea Girdle is the place for you to go,' says the reporter. 'It's a nice quiet place with good people. But you'd better tellergraf you're coming because it's Saturday and there'll be a big crowd and no rooms.'

"So the three went with him to send a tellergraf, after which the reporter rushed away.

"Yes, you've guessed what happened. Bill's wife read the story, all right, but that's only a small part of what happened to his hard laid plans.

"He didn't have the heart to tear hisself away from the sailmaker and the ship's carpenter right away, so they wandered arount and had a box at a show that eve-

ning and all, until Bill 'ud missed five trains. So he decided to wait till morning to go to the pleasure resort, and they got rooms in a lodging house. Having the whole rest of his life to get to the hotel he didn't get up till late the next morning, and it was after noon when he says good-by to the ship's carpenter and the sailmaker forever.

"About an hour and a half later he walked inter the lobby of the quiet, exclusive hotel with a bell boy carrying his dunnage. They was quite a few people in the lobby, he seen, most of 'em being ladies who stared at him, making him feel kind of timidlike. But he was proud for wunst that he was a sailor, with the frail looking men in white pants he seen arount.

"'I come for that cabin aloft I tellergraffed for,' he says to the clerk, who was looking at him kind of intently through big specks.

"A silence had fell over the lobby, and everybuddy seemed to be watching him and listening. Never before since he could remember had he made such a sensation, just walking inter a place.

"'Let's see, what's your name?' asks the clerk.

"'William Smith,' speaks out the bos'n.

"Them two words had the same effect as a hard blow of wind hitting inter a rotten sail. Pandemonium broke loost in the lobby with about twelve ladies rushing acrosst the floor at him at wunst.

"During the instant before they got to him Bill had the opportunity to run his astunned eyes arount and seen they was all shapes and sizes of ladies. Some had smart clothes and complexions like ice cream sundaes like what he 'ud seen ladies on Broadway have, whilst some was scrawny and more hungry looking.

"It was one of these last that got to him first. She throwed her arms arount his neck and give him a' nenthoosiastic smack of a kiss, saying:

"'Here's my husband! At last!'"

"But a bigger one grabbed her arms from away from him, saying:

"'Don't you dare put your arms arount my husband!'

"Then they all begin talking so fast he couldn't keep track of what they said no more. Whilst this was going on, pro and con, with the ladies milling arount him, he retreated back'ards, pale and astonished, and dumb as a deadlight. The clerk jumped over the desk and tried to help him, but his specks got broke in the meelay. So Bill turned and run through the first door he seen, it happening to be the dining room.

"In between the tables and chairs he dodged, with all them ladies clost after him, and those eating in there jumping up frightened. But there weren't no way outa the dining room at the other end, and, after wearing ship and falling over a bass drum, he fin'ly fought through 'em and back down the dining room again.

The clerk and a detective was waiting for him at the door, and just as he shot through it they closed it, turning the key and locking the ladies in.

"After getting the door closed they grabbed Bill and held him whilst the guests, bellboys, and help from the kitchen with knives and cleavers, gathered arount.

"'Now,' the detective says, 'what in the all fired Harry are you trying to do here?'

"'I ain't trying to do nothing,' the bos'n says, running his handkerchief acrosst his forehead. 'I give up the sea for a quiet, peaceful time and I come here to get it. That's the first time I knew I was so attractive to the opposite sex.'

"'But,' says the clerk, who had put on his specks with the glasses out, 'how do you explain about forty-nine wimin coming here saying they are Mrs. William Smith and you are their husband?'

"'Figgering on making a Turkish palace outa this hotel, wasn't you?' says the detective, knowingly.

"'All this ain't no doing of mine,' the bos'n says. 'Somebuddy's playing a joke on me, mebbe.'

"'You'll think it's a joke,' the detective says. 'What we wanter know, and quick, is which one of them wifes is you married to.'

"'How do I know?' says Bill.

"'How do you know?' repeats the detective, angerly. 'Well, you better know quick if you know what's good for you.'

"'If you want me to pick one,' Bill says, 'I choose that small brunette with them big blue eyes.'

"'Now look here,' the detective says, 'I ain't getting paid to take nobuddy's kidding. Which one of them wimin is you reely married to?'

"'Ain't I told you I don't know, you pair of sister hooks,' says Bill, aggervatedly.

"'Well, are you married to *any* of 'em, then?' screeches the detective.

"'I don't know,' roars Bill. 'The heads of you two 'ud make good capstan bars. If you don't let go me I'm going to haf to cave in somebuddy's hull here in a minit.'

"The detective and clerk looked at each other. They was both anger and dispair in them looks. The ladies and other guests locked in the dining room was pounding on the door. The kitchen help was holding their knives and cleavers ready for trouble.

"'Was you *ever* married?' says the detective, finly.

"'Sure,' Bill says, 'but I forget what she looked like, except she was a blonde.'

"The clerk and the detective kind of loosened their grips, whilst they looked at each other. This give Bill his chanst and he tried to break away, but too many hands had hold of him.

"'Where are you trying to go?' says the detective.

"'I'm taking my dunnage and go to a decunt place,' says Bill, straining. 'Avast that dragging my shoulders!'

"'Oh, no, you don't,' says the detective. 'You pay your bill here first and then you can go.'

"'I ain't had no lodging here,' Bills says.

"'But you owe for all them Mrs. William Smiths that says you're their husband,' says the clerk. 'They all got rooms and e't about ten dollars each already.'

"'What!' hollers Bill. 'What have I got to do with them ladies' bills, you porthole eyed robber?'

"'Didn't you say in front of all these witnesses,' says the detective, 'that you didn't know which one was your wife? Don't you know that husbands has to pay their wife's hotel bills?'

"Poor Bill begun to feel kind of weak. He seen most of his pay going at one lick.

"'It ain't my fault they come here,' he says. 'I don't want no wife bad enough to pay all them bills.'

"'Is it the hotel's fault they come here?' says the detective. 'Do you think the house is going to stand all this expense because you don't know your wife?'

"'Mebbe he'd rather go to jail,' the clerk says, with a wink at the detective, 'and do about twenty years for trying to obtain a wife by false pretenses.'

"Just then the doors to the dining room begin to wiggle, as if all the ladies had got together and was heaving at wunst. A little more, Bill seen, and he might be charged up with a door besides having all them ladies at him again. Also, he'd saw the detective's badge sticking from under his coat lapel, and he didn't like the idea of going to jail on his first day of his landsman life. It begin to look as if the cheapest way was to pay and get some place where he was safer off.

"He looked arount at all the guests and others there staring at him, and there weren't one, he seen, that weren't looking at him with suspicion in their eye.

"'All right,' he groans, 'holt them doors till I can get away and I'll pay you bluddy-handed piruts.'

"So the detective and all the bell boys put their shoulder against the door and held it whilst the clerk figgered and took Bill's money. It was about half of what he had. Seeing how things was, the clerk had prob'ly come to the conclusion that Bill was the only one he'd ever have a chanst to collect offen.

"After paying him the bos'n grabbed up his dunnage and run for the door. But he didn't quite get to it before another complercation set in.

"This complercation was a fat, blond lady who was twict as big as any lady there in the dining room. A kind of persentiment come over Bill the minit he seen her coming in the door carrying a' nold suit case and a tied clothes basket with dunnage sticking out. Although she looked just like a thousand other homely ladies he'd saw, there was something familiar about her, he seen.

"His heart sunk into his boots when

she grabbed him just as he was about to get past her. The suit case and the clothes basket fell on each side of her.

"'So, here's my husband!' she says.

"The detective and clerk and all the others there in the lobby looked at this new development with their jaws hanging loose. Ev'rybuddy was too took aback to talk.

"'You don't know me, mebbe,' she says, 'but I know you all right.'

"Bill looked at her with his heart about to founder. He knew, somehow, that this one was telling the truth. He felt even too weak to try to get away from her. She didn't try to kiss him like the others had done, neither.

"'What have you been doing in there that you're in such a hurry?' she says. 'Up to your old tricks again, are you?'

"'I never would of knew you,' he gulps out.

"'Of course not, with all this working and starving for fifteen years, you repperbate.'

"'You don't look starved to me,' Bill says.

"Just then the detective and the bell boys took their shoulder from the door. All the ladies come streaming out. They seen Bill at the door just about to slip from their hands. But here was a big blond lady, they seen, so they come at him more cautious. Bill's wife seen 'em, too.

"'Well, would you look at all the ladies he has!' she says, looking over her shoulder at him knowinglike. Then she took a position in the door with her hands on her big hips, waiting for 'em. They stopped when they got to her, like waves stop when they hit the side of a liner.

"'Let me get to my husband,' the first one says to her.

"'Your husband. is it?' says Bill's wife. 'When did he marry you?'

"'Fifteen years ago in Canarsie,' she says.

"'That ain't so,' another one says. 'I'm the one he married.'

"Then they all begin talking at wunst so that nobuddy knew what anybuddy said. Still blocking the door Bill's wife took her hands from offen her hips and begin rolling up her sleeves.

"'Now,' she says, when they was rolled, 'if any of you clinging vines thinks he's your husband, let's see you come and get him.'

"Again there come a silence in the lobby. The other ladies looked at them big, round arms and stepped back. The clerk, detective and bell boys begin to get outa the way. Nobuddy answered.

"'All right,' Bill's wife says, 'then let's see any *two* of you come and get him.'

"Still nobuddy moved.

"'Then let's see *all* of you come and get him,' she says, louder and fiercer than ever.

"The ladies looked at each other, their heads turning like swivel blocks, expecting somebuddy else to take the first chanst. But nobuddy did. Bill's wife begin walking slowly toward 'em, like a rastler ready to spring. They fell away before her, and of a sudden they was all running for the stairs. Even the other lady guests, who didn't have nothing to do with it, run when they seen her looking at 'em.

"Whilst this was going on the bos'n had been thinking. Here, after all these years looking for a beautiful wife, look what a plainlike one he had found! If he'd only uv knew how much she had changed he wouldn't uv spent so much time looking for her.

"His mind went back to the ship's carpenter and the sailmaker. How peaceful things looked back there with them now! Anyhow, he was glad they weren't there to see her. He seen she was too changed for a proud man like him with still a half year's pay in his pocket. So he had begun tiptoeing offen the porch, but he didn't even get to the edge.

"'Where you going?' she says, rushing out.

"'I'm going some place where it ain't so noisy,' he says.

"'Grab up this basket and don't hand me no guff,' she says. 'You got away from me fifteen years, but you don't get away again.'

"Bill took up the basket and she took up the suit case. Then she grabbed him by the arm and steered him down the road. Poor Bill, cargoed down with the basket

and dunnage, looked like a big limejuicer getting snaked to sea. He give a last look over his shoulder at the place he had come for quiet.

"'Where we going?' he asts.

"'Down to the station,' she says. 'That hotel ain't any place for you with all them ladies. Home is where you belong.'

"'I don't wanter go home,' Bill says.

"'What of it? The place for a married man is home, although it took you fifteen years to find it out.'

"'I don't care for married life, neither,' he says.

"'You'll haf to get ust to it, same as other men. The paper said you was longing for your wife again, and now you got her.'

"'Last night's paper. Didn't you know it had all about us in there? How you'd been gone for fifteen years, marooned, and come back with a fortune, but couldn't be happy without your wife. And how your trubble and trials and adventures with cannibals had kind of obliterated your brain so you couldn't remember what she looked like. And how sad you was going to a summer resort without her.'

"Bill slammed down the basket and swore perfoosely. So here, he seen, was the explanation of his foundered plans! He would uv give his whole half year's pay to uv been able to get only a two-finger holt on that reporter's neck. He grabbed up the basket again.

"'Let's hurry,' he says. 'They's a marlinspike headed, weak-livered young lubber in New York that's going to get a boot in the bilges that'll knock his timbers loost.'

"So they went on down the road toward the station, with people looking cur'ously at 'em as they hurried along and poor Bill getting angerer.

"'What made you change so much?' he says. 'You was beauterful when I married you.'

"'Are you trying to hint that I'm homely now?' she fires back angerly. 'Is insults the first thing I get after you've deserted me for fifteen years?'

"'I ain't insulting you,' Bill says. 'I'm only telling the truth.'

"'Oh, you are! Well, you ain't turned inter no male Venus yourself. You oughta be glad I took you back.'

"'I ain't, though,' Bill says.

"So they argued back and forth till they got to the station, where Bill took out his wallet to buy tickets. It was then she thought she better investergate the money he was supposed to have.

"'Let's see that money you got there,' she says, grabbing it.

"Bill kind of groaned. Here was the rest of his pay going at one lick, he seen. She took the roll of bills and set down to count 'em over.

"'Where's the rest of it?' she asts.

"'They ain't no more,' Bill says, measuring the distance to the door with his eye.

"'Why ain't they?' she says, springing up. 'Are you trying to make me believe you spent a whole fortune in one day?'

"'I only had a year's pay,' he says.

"'Well, this ain't no year's pay,' she says. 'You ain't give me a cent in fifteen years. Now come across and be quick.'

"'I got robbed outa the rest,' Bill says.

"'How?'

"'I had to pay all them ladies' bills at the hotel,' he says.

"The train coming in was prob'ly the only thing that saved poor Bill's life. She had already begun to pound him with the suit case. But she give that over by grabbing him and heaving him onter the train.

"'Get in there and sit down,' she says. 'I'll make life miserable from now on for you, you ruffun repperbate.'

'For a long time she set there, counting the money over and over. After while she put it in her pocketbook and begin to talk dreamylike.

"'Them ladies left us a little,' she says. 'We can get a house out in Astoria for fifteen dollars a month. It needs part of a wall and the cellar's got to be dug out again, but you can do that and carry washing in your spare time.'

"'I know a contracting engineer that'll give you a job carrying railroad ties,' she continners. 'The hours is from seven to six and you get your nights home—mebbe you can work up to slinging a sledge hammer—'

"Bill begin measuring the distance to the

car door with his eye as he slumpedlike in his seat.

"'Pa and ma'll live with us—yes, and sister Lily—we got enough here to rent a pie-anna so's she can begin her voice practice—'

"Well," the cook began again after a pause, "that evening the ship's carpenter and the sailmaker was setting in the same place, that had onct been a saloon but was now a' nice cream parlor. They was looking kind of sadlike as they e't their ice cream sundaes.

"'It's now more'n five hours since Bill left,' the sailmaker was saying. 'He always was a lucky swab, he was. Think of him now, taking life luxerus and peaceful. No more of the rotten sea to worry about, and society ladies playing the pie-anna for him.'

"'He won't have nothing to do with us no more,' the ship's carpenter says. 'He'll get dudish like all the rest of them lubbers. He'll even get mad if anybuddy mentions he ever blew a bos'n's pipe.'

"'He earned it, though, Bill did,' says the sailmaker. 'Look how he stayed aboard a whole year, saving up all that money and taking guff and squee-gee handles from aft. He—'

"But that sentence weren't never finished by the sailmaker, because at that minit a figger busted through the doorway and rushed to the table. It was Bill, without no cap, his dunnage gone, and his eyes jumping like the wildcat when the hook goes down. The ship's carpenter and the sailmaker stared at him, the little spoons dropping from their hands.

"'Where can I sign on—quick?' hollers Bill huskily.

"'They's a hooker for Halifax on the tide in the morning,' gulps out the sailmaker.

"'That ain't far enough,' Bill says. 'I want one bound for Neggysaki or New Ginny!'"

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

HALF PORTIONS

BECAUSE we know each other sparingly
Some things there are life cannot take from me;
Because we meet but once or twice a year,
I can adore you with no haunting fear
To-morrow's sun will find me boring you—
Myself a little weary of you, too!
Because we have but memories of tears
And laughter that may echo down the years,
Instead of learning gradually the wise
And bitter knowledge of each other's eyes,
I am content to love you as you are—
Aloof, mysterious, as a summer star—
I can condone your silence, for I know
There is no place of pleasure where you go
But you could wish me sitting with you there!
It is enough to find you always fair,
Desirable, and still a thing denied,
Wanting your presence ever at my side,
And glad, with each recurring scented dusk,
Life did not give us time to reach the husk,
But left us, with one taste of amber wine,
A little mad—and more than half divine!

Thelma Stillson.

"In February of this year (1924) my third baby was born. Three months later found me with constipation, headaches and just dragging around – and *three small children.* I decided something had to be done. I started taking Fleischmann's Yeast, a cake morning and night. In a few weeks I was able to stop the use of cathartics; headaches and backaches were gone; and I had plenty of energy. I felt like a different woman."

Mrs. Marie T. Gardner,
Glencarlyn, Va.

You Know Such People—

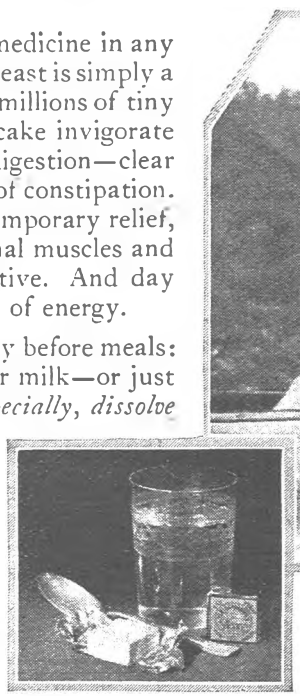
Full of a new zest and joy in living. Read their remarkable tributes to this simple fresh food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food. The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes a day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) night and morning.*

Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-16, The Fleischmann Co., 701 Washington St., New York.



A Famous Food *for health—start eating it today*

"As a child I had developed acne of the face, which became chronic in spite of medical care and good hygiene. Our family doctor advised trying Fleischmann's Yeast. I took it regularly for six months. . . . My face cleared, I lost that thin, pale look, and was able to continue with my work at college."

Miss Rose Cooperman, Brooklyn, N. Y.

LOFTIS
BROS. & CO. EST'D 1858

DIAMONDS WATCHES
CASH or CREDIT

No. 27
Blue White, perfect-cut Diamond. Solid 18-k White Gold. Price $100. Terms: $10 down, then
$2.50 A Week

No. 28
Blue White perfect-cut Diamond The ring is Solid 18-k White Gold. $37.50. Pay $3.75 down, then
$1.00 A Week

Genuine Diamonds GUARANTEED
We import Diamonds direct from Europe and sell direct by mail.

Send For Free Catalog
Over 2,000 illustrations of Diamond-set Jewelry, Watches, Wrist Watches, Pearls, Mesh Bags, Silverware, etc. Sent prepaid for your FREE EXAMINATION
TERMS: Goods delivered on first payment of one-tenth of purchase price; balance in equal amounts payable weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly, as convenient.
Money back if not satisfied.

18K

WEDDING RINGS
All Platinum, $25 up. With Diamonds: Three Diamonds, $65; five Diamonds, $80; seven Diamonds, $95; nine Diamonds, $110; surrounded by Diamonds, $225. Solid White or Green Gold, $5.00 up.

No. 16—Wrist Watch, Solid 18-k White Gold, 17 Jewels, $27.50. 14-k, 16 Jewels, $22.50.

Railroad Watches—Guaranteed to Pass Inspection
HAMILTON No. 992, 21 Jewels, Adjusted to 6 positions, Gold filled 25-Year Case $55
ELGIN'S LATEST RAYMOND, 21 Jewels; 8 Adjustments, Runs 40 hours one winding, Gold filled 20-Year Case . . . $55

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. EST'D 1858 THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS
Dept. N-139 108 N. State Street, Chicago, Illinois
Stores in Leading Cities

Relief in One Minute

CORNS

Make this test! See how instant and complete is your relief with Dr. Scholl's Zino-pads. They stop the *cause*—friction and pressure. No method so safe, quickly healing and absolutely antiseptic and scientific as this. At your druggist's or shoe dealer's.

For Bunions

Special Sizes for Bunions, Callouses, Blisters and Tender Spots.

For Callouses

Try this treatment. See how instantly it stops pain, soreness, irritation and soothes and heals the deeper tissues.

Dr Scholl's Zino-pads

Put one on—the pain is gone

FRECKLES

Now is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots.

Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from any drug or department store and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than an ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful complexion.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove your freckles.

We recommend Othine Complexion Soap for use with Othine, also as a shampoo—it's wonderful for bobbed hair—25c a cake at all drug or department stores or by mail. Othine Laboratories, Inc., Buffalo, N. Y.

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for April 1st, 1925. Required by the Act of Congress of August 24th, 1912.

State of NEW YORK } s.s.
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—Matthew White, Jr., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—Robert H. Davis, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—Wm. T. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Frank A. Munsey, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against The Frank A. Munsey Company.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1925.

{SEAL}

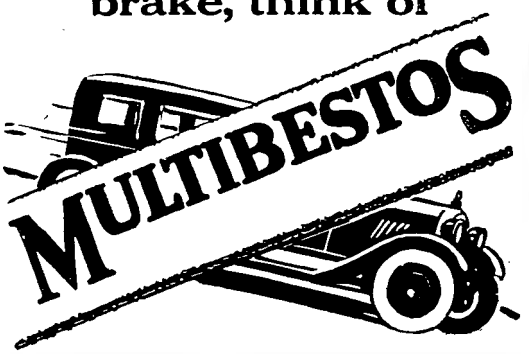
A. V. KASS, Notary Public.
New York County, No. 34.
New York Register No. 6060.
Term expires March 30th, 1926.

The Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine Published

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

Ten Cents—All News-stands

Every time you press down on the service brake, think of



THE SAFE BRAKE LINING

And send for the most valuable information on brakes ever brought together —"Braking Safe", a free booklet.

Department A F 5

MULTIBESTOS COMPANY

Walpole, Mass., U. S. A.

Mental strain calls for steady nerves — you'll find the use of Beeman's

"a sensible habit"

BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

Easy to Play
Easy to Pay

BUESCHER True Tone SAXOPHONE

BENNIE KRUEGER
Director Bennie Krueger and His Orchestra. Brunswick Records.

Easiest of all instruments to play and one of the most beautiful. Three first lessons sent free give you a quick easy start. In a few weeks you can be playing popular tunes. You can take your place in a band or orchestra in 90 days, if you so desire. Most popular instrument for dance orchestras, home entertainments, church, lodge and school. A Saxophone player is always popular socially and has many opportunities to earn money.

Six Days' trial and easy payments arranged.

Free Saxophone Book

Shows all Buescher models, first lesson chart; also pictures of famous professionals and orchestras. Send your name for a copy. Mention any other instrument in which you are interested. No obligation. Write today.

189 **BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.**
Everything in Band and Orchestra Instruments
497 Buescher Block, Elkhart, Indiana

Mail BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.
497 Buescher Block, Elkhart, Indiana.

Gentlemen: I am interested in the instrument checked below:

Saxophone ☐ Cornet ☐ Trombone ☐ Trumpet ☐

Mention any other instrument interested in .....

Name .....

Street Address .....

Town ..... State .....

10 DAYS TRIAL

$2 Brings You this Genuine DIAMOND

Lady's wide top solitaire. Latest Style 18 K. white gold hand engraved and pierced ring gives the blue white, perfect cut diamond extra brilliance and large appearance.
Regular price $85—special bargain price only
$62.50

A few cents a day will pay for this handsome ring. **Simply send $2 to us today.** Wear ring for 10 days' trial.

Guarantee

Absolute satisfaction; if you don't agree this ring is an amazing bargain, we will refund your money. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments.

Free Catalog showing bargains in Diamonds, Watches and Jewelry from $10 to $1000. Cash or liberal credit terms. Wonderful values. Write Dept. 627

BAER BROS. CO.
6 MAIDEN LANE - NEW YORK

When you start a serial in the Argosy-Allstory you only wait a week to go on with it. Start one this week, and you'll buy every number until it's concluded. Ten cents a copy, all news-stands.

Prest-O-Lite

Instant action! Unfailing power! And the greatest dollar for dollar battery value!

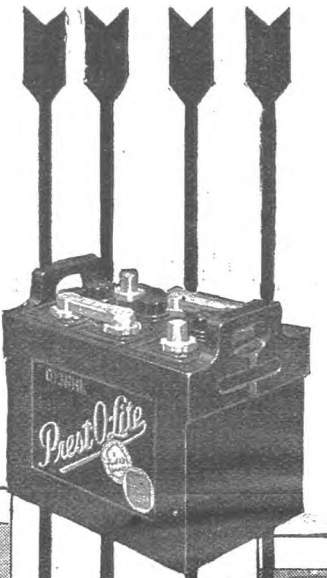
CERTAINLY, there is a big difference in batteries. You'll realize it once a Prest-O-Lite Battery powers the electric system of your car. Not only in the quick, live response at first. But after months and months of service, the same dependable power is there. The same eager power that spins the coldest motor; that keeps your lights bright, and your horn loud and cheerful!

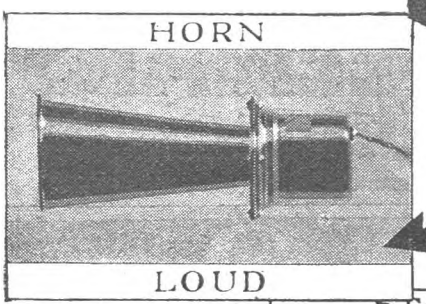
And there is a big difference in the price too. Standard Prest-O-Lite Batteries sell for only $15.50 and up—truly amazing values when you consider that there is no better battery built at any price.

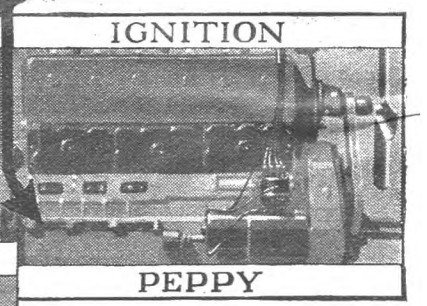
Think of these differences when you buy a battery for your car. Get a Prest-O-Lite—a battery that bears the approval of the world's largest electro-chemical battery research laboratories—that is initial equipment on a growing list of America's famous cars—and that is serviced by one of the largest organizations known to motorists. Ask, especially, to see the new Prest-O-Lite Super-Service Battery.

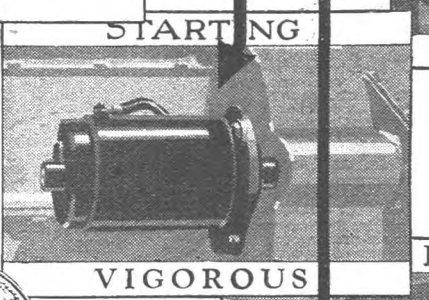
THE PREST-O-LITE CO., INC.
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

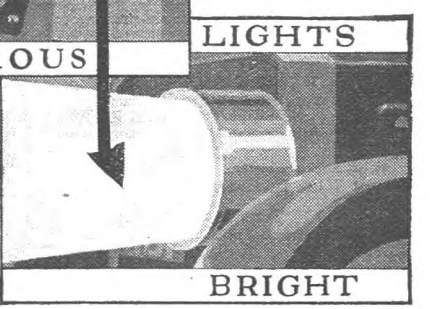
New York San Francisco
In Canada: Prest-O-Lite Company of Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Ont.





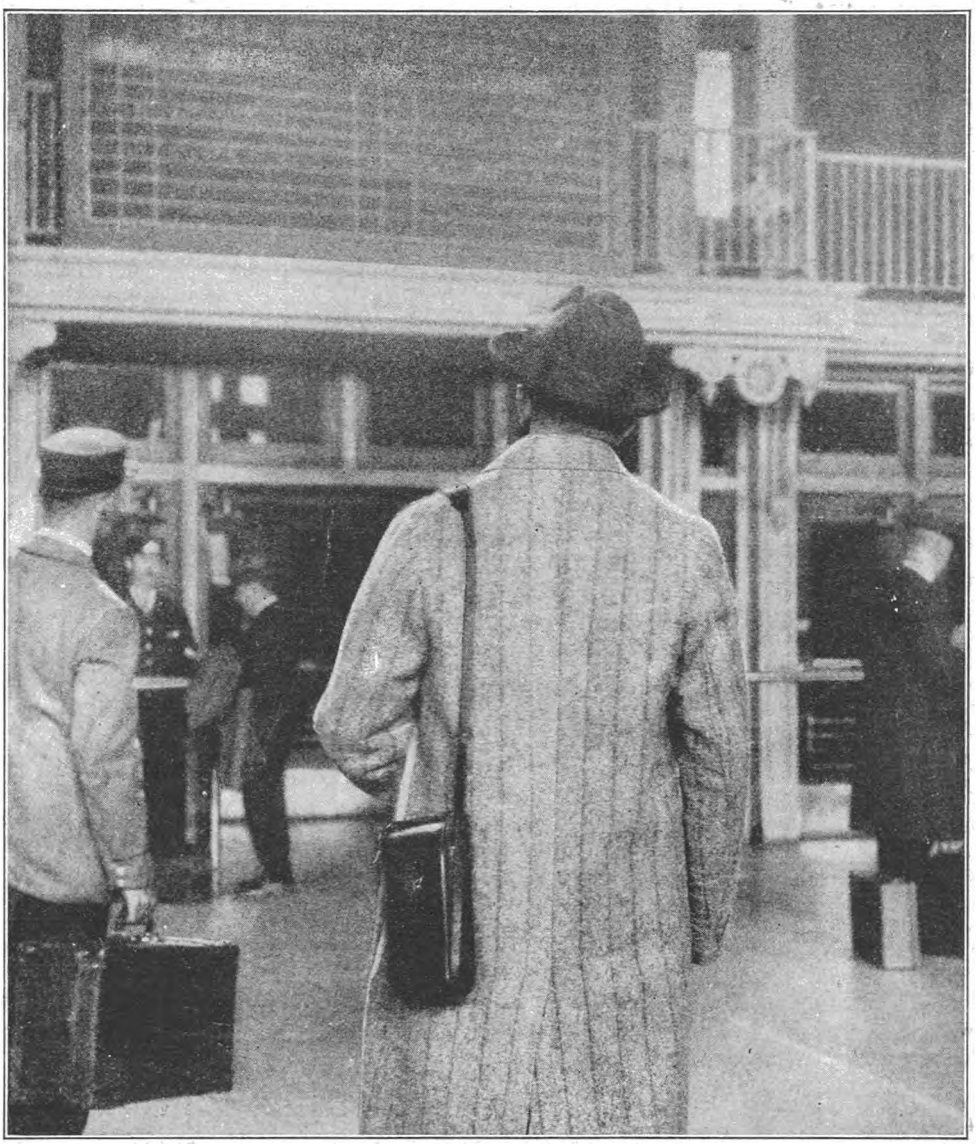






FOR RADIO—Prest-O-Lite Radio Batteries are standardized. The Prest-O-Lite Radio Chart, featured by dealers everywhere, will show you the batterythat suits your set.

Prest-O-Lite
PRODUCT
WORLDS LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF ACETYLENE THE GAS OF A THOUSAND USES
BATTERIES FOR AUTOMOBILES, FARM LIGHTING, RAILWAY SIGNALS AND RADIO



Take a Kodak with you

Autographic Kodaks $6.50 up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS ... in THE THIEF OF BAGDAD

SUCH POPULARITY MUST BE DESERVED

Mr. Fairbanks has won immense success in many roles, Chesterfield in but one. ≈ Yet the same simple maxim accounts for both – the surest way to win success is to deserve it.